



FROM ACADEMY AWARD® WINNER PAOLO SORRENTINO DIRECTOR OF THE GREAT BEAUTY



"MICHAEL CAINE... GIVES HIS BEST PERFORMANCE IN DECADES"



"HILARIOUS, VIVID AND BEAUTIFUL"



MASTERFUL... A VISUAL BANQUET OF A FILM"



"FILM-MAKING ON A GRAND, **OPERATIC SCALE"**



MICHAEL CAINE

HARVEY KEITEL

RACHEL WEISZ

PAUL DANO

AND JANE **FONDA**

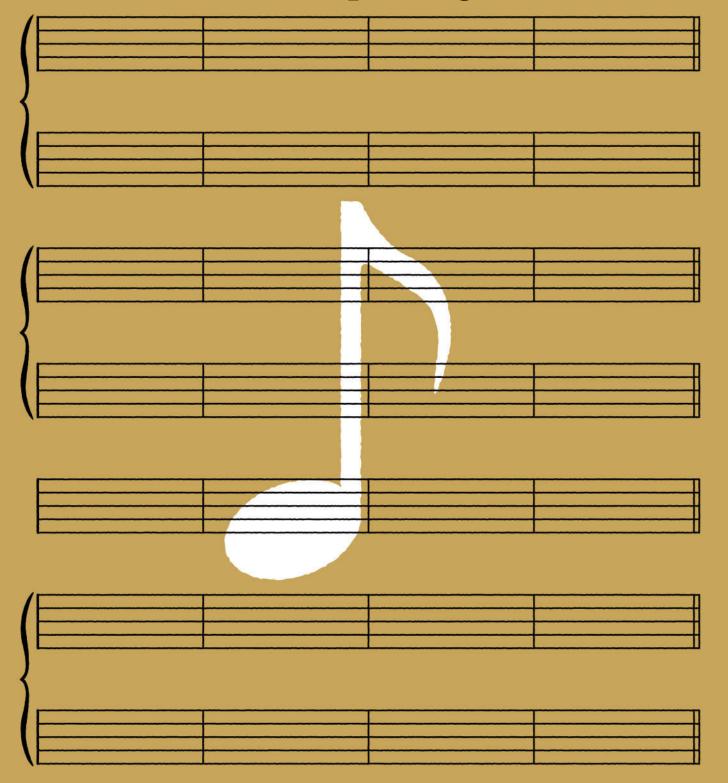
IN CINEMAS JANUARY 29

STUDIOCANALUK FYOUTHMOVIEUK

15 STRONG LANGUAGE

Arranged by Fred Ballinger

A Simple Song



A SIMPLE SONG

Youth

<u> </u>					
You say					
that emotions are overrated.					
But that's bullshit.					
Emotions are all we've got.					
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Directed by PAOLO SORRENTINO
Starring MICHAEL CAINE, HARVEY KEITEL, RACHEL WEISZ
Released 29 JANUARY

A legend of British cinema teams with Italy's master of screen sensuality to tell a sparkling tale of nostalgia and sorrow.

e tend to think of the ageing process as one of perpetual decline. The body grows weak, the mind tires, memories fade. Accepting our own mortality is one of the hardest realisations we face as human beings, yet the reality is that only a few of us will reach the point where "natural causes" – that most curious and vague of medical euphemisms – becomes a viable cause of death. We fear what we cannot control and believe the best we can hope for is a quick and painless exit. But what matters more: the manner in which you go, or making sure you're at peace with the world when your time is up?

In Youth, writer/director Paolo Sorrentino's operatic ode to old age, we're reminded that regardless of how many milestones someone passes, respect can take a lifetime to earn and a second to lose. Fred Ballinger (Michael Caine) may have some way to go before he can expect to receive a letter from the Queen, but here, on his annual retreat to the Swiss Alps, a different kind of Royal message becomes the catalyst for a cathartic cleansing of the soul. Ballinger is a British composer famed for his 'Simple Songs', which he is cordially invited – with great insistence from Her Majesty's toadying emissary (Alex Macqueen) – to conduct at a birthday concert for Prince Philip in London. He graciously declines citing "personal reasons", which seems like a convenient excuse from someone whose fire has apparently gone out. Later, after being pressed by the emissary during a second fruitless visit, a now visibly irritated Ballinger

offers a more satisfactory explanation, the full weight of which isn't felt until the closing stages of this extraordinary, life-affirming film.

This is Sorrentino's second English-language feature after 2011's This Must Be the Place, and while its meandering, idiosyncratic qualities ostensibly place it in the same stall as that David Byrne fanboy folly, Youth is an altogether more enriching character study. A good deal of the plaudits must go to Caine, who at 82 puts in one of the most daring, distinguished performances of his career. That heartfelt confession to the Queen's hapless messenger aside, this is a role that requires emotional intelligence without overstatement. Ballinger feels so lived-in that you begin to wonder whether Caine invested anything of himself in the part - at one point it's revealed that Ballinger previously refused a knighthood; in real life Caine has publicly stated that he is not fussed whether people refer to him as "Sir". Caine can still deliver a stirring monologue when he needs to, but there's nothing here quite so ostentatious as his 'some men just want to watch the world burn' speech from The Dark Knight. (Christopher Nolan could learn a thing or two from the way Sorrentino structures his script to play to the veteran actor's various strengths.) Ballinger may have officially retired, but in truth he never stopped conducting - whether he's wiping his nose with a handkerchief or rhythmically scrunching a sweet wrapper between his fingers. Instinctive gestures tell us more about his character than dialogue ever could, and Caine masters these mannerisms with all the craft and guile of a true maestro.





"We're always happy to be in Ballinger's company without ever truly caring about his struggles with grief and guilt. Until suddenly we do, and it's heartbreaking." Sorrentino has a decent track record when it comes to working with seasoned leads, of course, having helped Toni Servillo find his sweet spot in 2013's *The Great Beauty*. Like that *La Dolce Vita*-lite satiric drama, *Youth* is a meditation on life, love and loss as told through the mournful eyes of a somewhat selfish, somewhat senile protagonist. Yet while the sense of unfulfillment afflicting Servillo's elderly Roman socialite is born out of a general yearning for the past, the onset of Ballinger's apathy is intrinsically linked to a ghost from his present. It's telling that when the time to confront it finally arrives, the overwhelming feeling towards him is one of compassion. Herein lies Sorrentino's greatest trick: we're always happy to be in Ballinger's company without ever truly caring about his struggles with grief and guilt. Until suddenly we do, and it's utterly heartbreaking.

Ballinger isn't the only one putting up a front. The remoteness and tranquility offered by this idyllic Alpine setting attracts an unusual array of celebrities. But while Paul Dano's cred-hungry Hollywood actor, Jimmy Tree, an obese South American football icon and Miss Universe are each either trying to escape the limelight or else figuring out how they can get more of it, the thing that Ballinger is searching for is less tangible. For best friend Mick Boyle (Harvey Keitel), it's not a case of what he's hiding from but what he hopes to find. Mick is a renowned director who's past his prime but doesn't know it (or maybe he's simply in denial). The script for his next and possibly final film — which he prematurely refers to as his "testament" — is almost finished



but lacks an ending, so he and four budding screenwriters have booked into the luxury spa resort, willing inspiration to strike. So far it's proven frustratingly elusive. In one scene while out taking in the spectacular mountain scenery, Mick uses a tourist telescope to illustrate the difference between how close the future seems in youth compared to how distant the past appears with age. Sorrentino's use of symbolism ranges from absurd to inelegant, but this crystallising moment is perhaps the most eloquent expression of the film's emotional power.



Then there's Ballinger's daughter and personal assistant, Lena (Rachel Weisz), who's used to solving other people's problems but is plunged into a crisis of her own after being cruelly dumped by her fiancée (who also happens to be Mick's son). When Lena's father attempts to console her by extending an olive branch of empathy, she unleashes a ferocious expletive-ridden tirade. He never really knew her mother, Lena claims, and thus can't even begin to understand everything she's going through now. An even more cutting rejection occurs late on when Mick is visited by his former muse, the notorious diva Brenda Morel (Jane Fonda, dressed to the nines in a riotously funny cameo). He's been trying to convince her to star in his film knowing he won't get funding without her, but she's not about to do an old friend any favours. Both women owe a debt to the men

whose respective genius continues to cast a long shadow, yet crucially the overriding theme is one of male inadequacy.

Caine and Keitel's winning chemistry occasionally threatens to turn *Youth* into The Fred and Mick Show, but Sorrentino always manages to find a way to underpin their geriatric banter (bodily dysfunction is an especially popular topic of conversation) with something more profound. With their flaws laid bare, the two men slowly come around to the idea that it's never too late to start making up for past mistakes. This is a film that doesn't claim to have all the answers to life's biggest questions but, as with all great works of art, one that leaves plenty open to interpretation. And much like life itself, what you get out of it ultimately depends on what you're willing to bring to it. ADAM WOODWARD

ANTICIPATION.

We tend to run hot and cold on Paolo Sorrentino, but this one has bags of promise.



ANTICIPATION.

A joyous, gently moving experience anchored by a fearless central turn from Michael Caine.



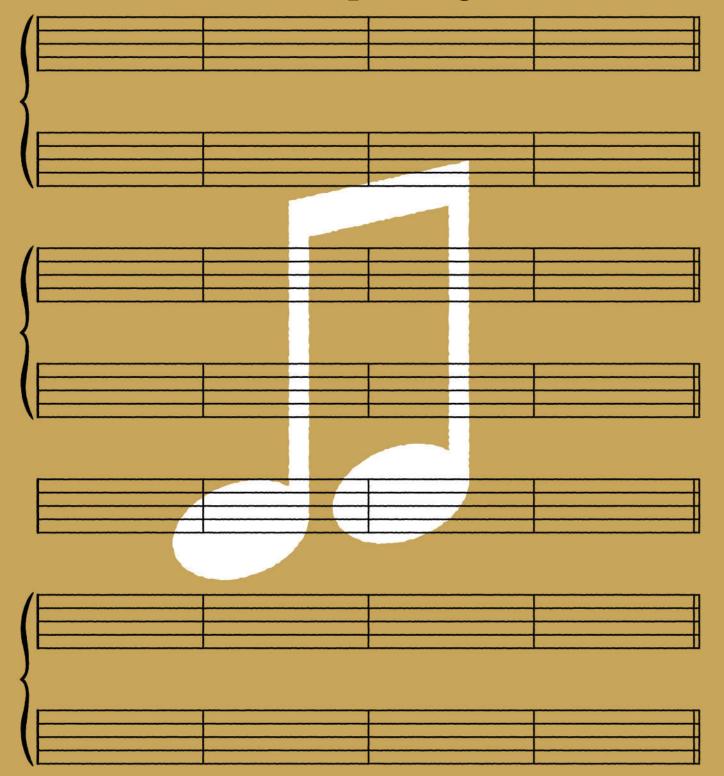
IN RETROSPECT.

A simple song.



Arranged by Fred Ballinger

A Simple Song



ACT II

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INTERVIEW BY SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN

EVERY BLOODY THIG

ILLUSTRATION BY OLIVER STAFFORD

LWLies speaks with a youthful Sir Michael Caine.

ichael Caine is propelled by such perky charm that everything he says - in public life or within character - seems peachy. It often isn't as simple as that, but such is the power of his unique persona. His voice is immediately recognisable, a blend of cockney chancer and man of the world. Film-wise, he has starred in the great and the good, the bad and the awful, albeit without ever personally delivering a duff performance. Caine is a consummate professional whose attention to craft began when, at aged 14, he took out a book on acting technique by the Russian actor Vsevolod Pudovkin from the Southwark Public Library. "Film acting is re-acting, not acting" and "never blink before the camera" are self-taught lessons still evident in his performances today.

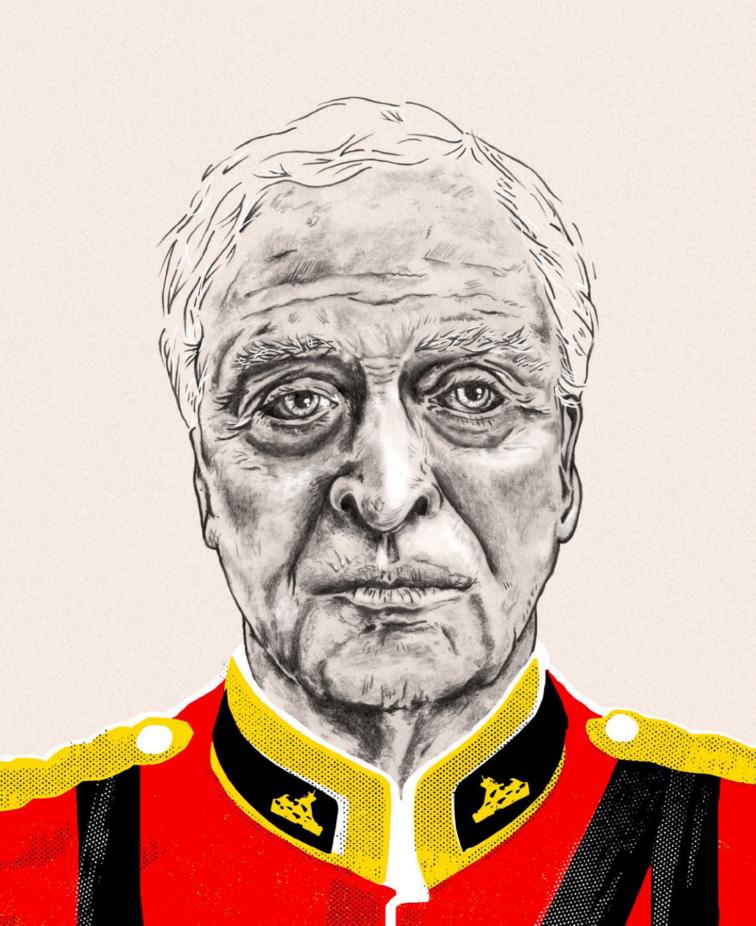
Caine has been through a lot, on and off screen. He is open to the point of pride about his upbringing among the poor, working classes of south London. He was part of the evacuations during World War Two, and in 1952, national service took him to Korea for two years. From there, it was full steam ahead into the world of acting. His eyes were always on the movies as he slogged away in theatre and then in television, absorbing advice from colleagues and mentors at every opportunity. His first film role finally came in 1964 with Cy Endfield's *Zulu*.

"His name is Michael Caine and no one will forget his name: Michael Caine. He walks straight into sensational stardom in *The Ipcress File*, as he gets right under the skin of the brash, cocky, wryhumoured Harry Palmer." So announces a clipped voice in the 1965 trailer for Sidney J Furie's 1965 film *The Ipcress File*, propaganda which would prove to be prophetic. In 1966 along came *Alfie* and the essence of Caine's ability to make the camera love him as a rogue.

He refers to women as "it" and, miraculously, remains adorable. He reached America in the same decade, starring opposite Shirley MacLaine, who personally sought him out for a role in Ronald Neame's Gambit.

It's been a full 5O years of A-game work in Hollywood and back home in the UK, across serious drama, slapstick comedies, genre films and arthouse gems. He has worked as favours for pals, for the high-life and for the love of acting. Caine enjoys telling movie star anecdotes. The span of his career means there's gold at his fingertips on the likes of John Wayne, Jack Lemon, Cary Grant and Bette Davis. He has worked for with Brian De Palma, Woody Allen, John Huston, Joseph L Mankewicz and Alfonso Cuarón. Christopher Nolan basically won't make a film without him. He is comically alive to the sweeteners of location and famously agreed to act in Jaws: The Revenge after seeing on the first page of its script the words, "Fade in: Hawaii". This shoot meant he was unable to accept his Best Supporting Actor Oscar for Hannah and Her Sisters, in which he is sublime – adding heavyweight pathos to Woody Allen's flyaway New York.

Paolo Sorrentino's Youth adds another rich role to the canon. Caine plays Fred Ballinger, an elderly, retired composer who now resides in a luxury Swiss resort. Here he shoots the breeze with his director friend, Mick (Harvey Keitel), and rings in the changes that come with age. It becomes apparent from the arrival of his daughter, Lena (Rachel Weisz), that Fred has not always been a loving father. Caine makes him a success and a failure, a comic presence with tragic burdens. When LWLies met with Caine after Youth's premiere at the 2015 Cannes Film Festival, he was willing to talk about his family, his friends, his memories... every bloody thing.



LWLIES: DO YOU HAVE TO STAVE OFF THE MEMORY LOSS THAT CAN COME WITH AGEING? Caine: No. I spent 60 years remembering dialogue. What happens is, as I get older, I don't forget it but it takes me 10 times longer to learn the bloody thing, that's where the mental thing goes. I used to look at the script to go "okay". They'd give me a page of dialogue and say, "We shoot it in 20 minutes." They give me a page now and I say, "We'll shoot this next week."

FRED AND MICK TALK ABOUT WISHING THAT THEY COULD REMEMBER SPECIFIC EVENTS IN MORE DETAIL. CAN YOU RELATE? No. I have a memory like a computer. I remember every bloody thing. Oh, it's dreadful. I have a memory so full of stuff that I wish I could get the garbage guy to come round and clear some out.

WHEN DID YOU FIRST KNOW YOU HAD A GOOD MEMORY? Always. But my best friend died of dementia. What's it called – not dementia – Alzheimer's. It's like watching someone walk away to the horizon very slowly. It takes them three years to get out of sight and then they're gone. I remember going round his house. I came in and he didn't know who I was for the first time, the very first time. He was my tailor actually. His name was Doug Hayward.

HOW DID IT AFFECT YOU? I started looking up books which tell you what to eat. You know you get all of those pills? I'm a bit too old for them. I'm 82. I think, "You're so old dementia says, 'Forget it."

FRED AND MICK'S FRIENDSHIP IS ROOTED IN ONLY SAYING NICE THINGS TO EACH OTHER. IS THAT ALSO YOUR CONCEPT OF FRIENDSHIP? Oh yeah, I've never said anything nasty to my closest friends. I have 11 closest friends. I was sitting someplace very lonely on location in Africa, and I thought, "I wish my friends were here," and then I counted them. I have 11. I have about eight now. Three are dead. But none of them have I ever had a row with. We never say things like, "You're great and you're fantastic but you know what's wrong with you?" We never say that. Nothing's wrong with you. Nothing.

ARE ANY OF THEM PEOPLE WE MIGHT KNOW? One of my closest friends is a composer called Leslie Bricusse. He wrote 'What Kind of Fool Am I?' [from Stop the World - I Want to Get Off] He wrote millions of songs. He's one of my closest friends and we've never said a bad word. We've known each other 52 years.

YOU SEEM TO BE VERY LOYAL. YOU USED TO BE THE WOMANISER WHO WAS PLAYING ALFIE, AND YOU'VE HAD A MARRIAGE OF NEARLY - WHAT IS IT? - 50 YEARS? 46.

WHAT'S THE SECRET BEHIND THAT? KEEPING OLD FRIENDSHIPS AND KEEPING YOUR VERY BEST FRIEND, YOUR WIFE? All of my friends got married. We were all chasing girls when we were young and then we all got married at about the same time. We all married very happily, and none of us ever got divorced. Oh, wait, I got divorced. I got married when I was 20 and divorced when I was 22, which is usually what happens if you get married when you're 20.

BUT IF YOU'RE A MOVIE STAR, THERE ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES. Yes, I know that. But the first thing I did was I married the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen in my life. I still mean that. And we always go on location together. Location is the tricky part, because some actors say location doesn't count, in their marriage. Everywhere counts in my marriage.

HAVE YOU EVER HAD THE FEELING THAT YOU NEGLECTED YOUR CHILDREN BECAUSE OF YOUR CAREER, LIKE FRED DOES? No, they used to come on location with me if it was good. Everybody always travelled with me everywhere: the whole family. For instance, I'm going to do a movie in New York in August and I'm not staying in a hotel room. I've got a house with a swimming pool and a tennis court. The grandchildren, their nannies, everyone is coming. I travel with the whole bloody lot.

DO YOU DOTE ON THE GRANDKIDS NOW? Oh, the grandkids, don't get me started on them. I'll bore the pants off you for six hours. I had two daughters, and my first grandchild was a boy and he looks exactly like me only better looking. I didn't know the other two were coming, the twins. They were later. But this boy became my son and, to this day, is my son in my mind. I'm one of his fathers. He's got two fathers. We were watching a cartoon together one day and a commercial for $B\alpha tm\alpha$ came on, one of my movies. I'm standing there with Batman, and he looked at me. He didn't know I'm an actor. He was about four. He said: "Do you know Batman?" I said, "Yeah, he's a friend of mine." And he told everybody. He stood up at school in the class and said, "My pa's a friend of Batman's."

THERE'S BEEN A LOT OF CARICATURES OF YOU, LIKE THE DORK KNIGHT. It's a compliment. People say to me: "Do you get annoyed at people stopping you in the street?" I say, "Not as annoyed as I'd get if they didn't stop me in the street."

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUTH? This film is about life. It's funny, it's sad, it's everything. It's not a comedy, it's not a drama, it's not a satire. It's not a musical, but there's a lot of music in it. It's Paolo, that's what it is, Paolo's view of things and I love it.

WHAT SENSE DO YOU MAKE OF THE OUTRAGE OF THE ACTRESS (JANE FONDA) TOWARDS THE DIRECTOR (HARVEY KEITEL)? I was trying to figure out who she was based on. I think it might have been Bette Davis or, I'll tell you who: Joan Crawford. I never knew Joan Crawford but I knew Bette Davis. Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy were friends of mine from New York theatre. One night I was in New York on my own, publicising a movie, and they said, "Come out to dinner with us." I said yes. They said, "We've got you a date." I said, "Okay. Who is it?" It was Bette Davis. We had a great evening together. I was about 40, she was about 75. At the end of the evening she says to me: "I am going home alone in a taxi." Just in case I was gonna make the first move.

HOW WAS SHOOTING THE SCENE WITH MISS UNIVERSE? Well that was awkward because the water wasn't there. That's CGI - that was put in later. The platform that you see is their platform that they use. That's the way you get across the square when it floods. But the most awkward thing for me was when I got to the other end I had to drown. I had to drown with no water and everyone's going "What the hell?" I'm doing this standing on the platform that's in St Mark's Square. I was very happy when I saw the movie because I'd never seen it with the water and the lights and everything. I thought it was fabulous the way it looked.

BUT MISS UNIVERSE WASN'T A SPECIAL EFFECT? No, oh blimey no. She's not is she? She's incredible. Beautiful. Something reminded me of fast prejudice. I loved the girl, I thought she was a smashing girl. She did the nude scene and everything. Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful. I thought, 'She's wonderful.' Then she had this long scene, screaming and lots of dialogue. And I thought, 'Oh shoot we're gonna be here all night.



She's gonna screw this up.' She did it in two takes. You see, what's great about her is she can really act this girl. And she's a lovely girl.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE DOING A NUDE SCENE WITH HARVEY KEITEL? We kept our clothes on. We don't want to upset anyone. Nobody told us about her. Paolo didn't tell us. We were just sitting there in the pool. He said we're just sitting there relaxing and then someone will come in the pool – a pretty girl's gonna come in the pool. He didn't tell us she was nude. We thought the pretty girl was gonna come in a bathing costume, you know, and we're gonna be like dirty old men standing there. That's why you've got the stunned look on their faces.

"You get an Academy Award, it's for a performance. You get a knighthood, it's for a life."

WHICH ACTOR HAS MOST INFLUENCED YOU AND WHY? Humphrey Bogart and Marlon Brando. Humphrey, because he could talk like an ordinary human being. I know he was supposed to be a tough guy, but there was a reality to Bogart which a lot of others didn't have. And Brando because he was such an incredible actor. He wasn't just standing there, he would do all sorts of things. I found out that he couldn't remember his bloody lines. He used to have them on the wall everywhere. I wish I could've done that. I met one actor who said that Brando typed his lines on his forehead. I thought, "It's a good job I wasn't an actor then, he wouldn't have got away with that on my forehead."

BOGART AND BRANDO WERE FROM MODEST BACKGROUNDS. WHICH WAS POSSIBLE FOR AMERICAN ACTORS EARLIER THAN IN THE UK. DO YOU THINK YOU WERE PART OF A WORKING-CLASS BREAKTHROUGH THERE? Yeah, I was one of the first ones, but that's not conceited because I didn't do it, the writers did it. I was very fortunate to become an actor, when the writers came along. For instance, the British screenwriters never wrote war stories about private soldiers. Only Americans wrote war stories about private soldiers. They didn't write about officers, the British wrote about officers. They wrote about the middle-class all the time, until John [Osborne] came along and wrote 'Look Back in Anger', which was the first time there had been a working class person in the lead. And Noël Coward wrote one too. Then there was a play called 'The Long and the Short and the Tall', which - in the theatre I'm talking about - made Peter O'Toole a star. He gave a fabulous performance in that play. I was his understudy and I took over when he went to do Lawrence of Arabia. And that was the first play ever about private soldiers.

HAS PRODUCTION BEGUN ON GOING IN STYLE WITH ALAN ARKIN AND MORGAN FREEMAN YET? I started that on 3 August in New York. Alan Arkin, Morgan Freeman and me are three old guys. The bank forecloses on the mortgage on our flat and we can't pay it. So we rob the bank. And that's it. The three of us rob the bank.

DO YOU THINK THERE IS A CONFLICT RETWEEN YOUTH AND OLD AGE? IN YOUR 2009 FILM, HARRY BROWN, THERE WAS A MORAL CONFLICT BETWEEN THE OLD AND THE NEW GENERATION. I shot Harry Brown where I come from. I could see where my house used to be. We were bombed out in the war and then they made these pre-fabricated houses with asbestos. We used to live in those. Which, funnily enough, was a lot better: we had a bathroom, hot water running, everything. And they pulled it down and put new flats in, council flats. I was working there with these guys. One thing that had changed about it was racially. When I grew up everyone was white. Now it's 50-50 black and white there. But they're all the same, and they're all tough. What had changed was drugs. We used to get drunk and have a fight. Now it's drugs and they've got knives and pistols. There's a lot of money in it. I used to sit down with these gangster guys, gangs, really scary people; but not me because I am them, so there was no reason for me to be afraid - and every time I sat down with a new lot they'd say, "First question: How did you get out of here Michael?" I felt so sorry for them.

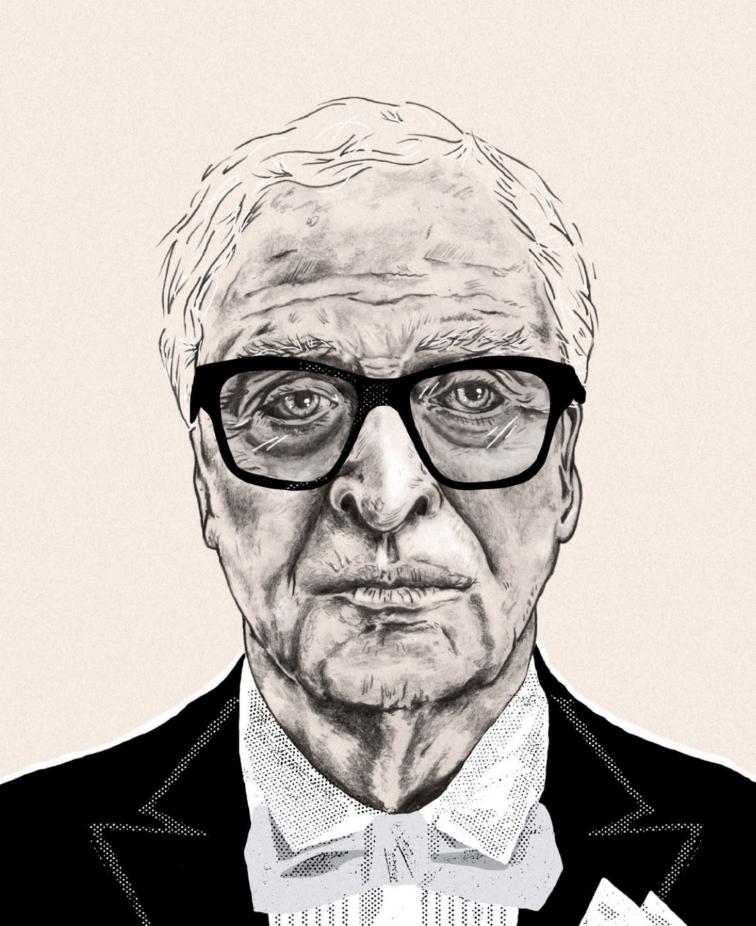
HOW DID YOU GET OUT? I went in the army. Prince Harry has just said something that I agree with: bring back national service. In England we served in the army for two years. And I did it. And you don't have to do two years like we did, and you don't have to go kill anyone like we did. Just six months of army training and discipline. Then you come out feeling that you deserve to live here because you've trained to defend this place, should someone come. It's a thing of loyalty and I think it would be very important. When I came out I was one of the last lot to do national service in 1953. I watched the younger generation and they changed. The generation that made the '60s were the ones who'd been in the army. The ones who made the '70s were the ones who went into the drugs.

YOUR CHARACTER IN YOUTH DOESN'T SEEM TO GIVE A SHIT ABOUT WHAT THE QUEEN ASKS OR DEMANDS. WHAT ARE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT BEING KNIGHTED? I was very proud. I love the monarchy. I think they're great and they're a massive tourist attraction, too. If we didn't have a monarchy I think we'd have about a quarter of the tourists.

BUT FOR YOU PERSONALLY? You get an Academy Award, it's for a performance. You get a knighthood, it's for a life.

CARY GRANT ONCE SAID: TO BE FAMILIAR WITH AUDIENCES IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING. AND IT'S BEEN WRITTEN THAT YOU FOLLOWED THAT KIND OF ADVICE. Yeah well he was familiar. He was in the circus when he was seven or eight. I was very close friends with Cary Grant. I was doing a movie in Bristol, south of England, and I came out of my hotel suite one morning and there's Cary Grant walking towards me. I didn't know what to say because I was a big fan. I was like a young girl with Elvis Presley. I said, 'You're Cary Grant?' He said, 'I know.' So I tried to think of a more sensible question. I said, 'What are you doing here?' He said, 'My mother lives in the suite next door to you.' His mother was sick. Instead of putting her in a hospital, he put her in a luxury suite in a hotel with nurses and everything. It wasn't like a hospital. She could get everything in: food, order room service. We became friends after that.

IS THERE A FILM IN YOUR CAREER THAT YOU WOULD HOLD NEAR AND DEAR, LIKE FRED DOES FOR 'SIMPLE SONGS' IN YOUTH? I suppose the film I hold dearest is The Ipcress File. Because of the first time I ever went over the title





WORDS BY SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN

THE PUPPET MASTER

ILLUSTRATION BY LAURÈNE BOGLIO

The lauded director of *Youth* proves to be an enigmatic puzzle box of contradictions and hidden defences.



'm in a philosophical mood but I don't know if I'm up to it - so I just hope not to disappoint you."

Paolo Sorrentino is sitting on a hard sofa on the second floor of a Parisian restaurant. He glances forward warily while smoking a cigar. Downstairs, a fluffy

tabby cat is stretched out in the ladies bathroom. Sorrentino and the feline share the same relaxed posture, and the ability to deflect advances at lightning speed should a person reach out with too much familiarity.

This distance is surprising given the mood conjured by Youth. There's an existential lightness to the director's seventh feature that suggests a soul in search of release. That said, previous films The Great Beauty and Il Divo depict men who look down on life from ivory towers, letting wealth insulate them from involvement with others. The Great Beauty's Jep Gambardella, a world-weary ageing playboy poetically observing Roman high life, is not unlike the neatly dressed, sharp-eyed man who is both here and not here. His physical presence adds a frisson to the room, but the inner workings of his mind remain a mystery.

A slew of abstract jump-off points have been prepared by this fan, eager to discuss life, the universe and everything with a man who creates moving cinema by marrying visual spectacle with weary melancholy. I inform Sorrentino of this desired line of questioning. His face betrays no emotion as, through a translator, he delivers the warning about potential disappointment.

Youth is all about the wistful fact that memories are lost with time. Retired composer, Fred (Michael Caine) and practising director, Mick (Harvey Keitel), talk about looking back at their lives as if through the wrong end of a telescope. What used to loom large is now distant and indefinable. This sensibility is so palpable in his film it must lead to a rich vein of enquiry, right? Movies are time capsules, defiantly preserving memories that would otherwise erode away. Is this one of his motives for making films? His face shows no flicker of expression. He swerves to lighter ground: "Filmmaking is like prolonging the pleasure of playing that I had when I was a child, but when I was a child I played with puppets and now I play with actors."

I wonder if he thinks I am an idiot poser for attributing deep-soul motives to game playing, and give him the opportunity to correct my logic. He doesn't take it and also doesn't say much by way of acknowledgement. He is a man who seems to listen without recognising the core of what has been said. He is a man who seems to speak for a long time without revealing too much of himself.

"When I mention the fact that film is a game that you play, I don't intend to minimise the importance of the issues that it deals with. Memory is one of the main themes of the film and to me is very important itself. Michael Caine suffers a lot because he is afraid that his memory will vanish - it has more to do with the relationship that he has with his daughter than anything else."

Sorrentino's game seems to be to talk around personal connections to his work, cutting himself out of the picture as he pushes the film to the fore. It's a strategy that's working. He sits, puffing on his cigar, communicating with easy detachment. Future interviewers, take note: questions may be best rewarded if they focus on the technical craft of image-making. There are enough breathtaking and surreal visual flourishes in Youth to inform a dozen interviews. But it's too late. Here we are, in a room that is momentarily deafened as several cars continuously honk their horns outside the restaurant.



I make a joke that the translator loyally repeats in Italian. Sorrentino makes eye contact and smiles. Maybe there's hope for us? He is not allowing himself stroked, but he hasn't run away to hide under the sofa. I dive in with what feels like another painfully transparent, 'Please reveal yourself to me!' question. Fred is in his eighties while Paolo is in his forties. In building Fred's world, did he imagine what type of an old man he will eventually become? His response is a sidestep, though a slightly more forthcoming one.

"When you count the years, mathematics is always against us. It's against me and it's against everybody else."

Had the question been, 'How do you conceive of the ageing process?' this answer would have been on point: "I think of it in terms of numbers, the years I have left, the years I've lived already, so it's more of an arithmetic, mathematical issue to me. The problem is that when you count the years, mathematics is always against us. It's against me and it's against everybody else."

Mathematics is one thing, but the beauty of *Youth* is that it shows Fred, an elderly man, taking stock of the glory and absurdity that is

still lavishly daubed across his world. This perspective must come from the man before me. Finally, there is a hint of a complicated spirit: "This idea of freedom... If your idea of life is to be young at all ages and not give into the idea of, 'I can no longer do this,' it depends on the perception that you have of yourself and of your freedom of movement. Of course, if you're 95 you won't be able to play soccer but you would have, in your mind, the freedom of that particular game, or when you played it, and that spirit is still with you. And that keeps you young. This is the main idea that prevents me from getting depressed at time passing."

A clue now drops, pointing to why it's so difficult to connect the man to the cadences of his work. I ask how he came to understand a character who, for a long stretch of the film, is backing away from his passions and his life. Sorrentino insists that it is purely an exercise in craft. "If we were to create characters that are all like us because we only know ourselves so deeply as to be able to portray them then there wouldn't be any films, there wouldn't be any novels. What we are asked to do is to try to understand someone who is very far from us in terms of viewpoints."

It sounds plausible, but doesn't every fictional character contain the DNA of their creator, no matter how different the two seem? Sorrentino's attachment to his characters must take place at such a personal level that he will not express it for fear of coming undone. Intimately engaging was not his style, but it is mine. So to respond to his opener: this was disappointing because we passed each other without touching, like people lost in separate dreams. But it wasn't disappointing because you learn as much about someone by what they won't say as by what they will. Sorrentino is a man who channels profound emotions into films and refuses to replicate the experience in conversations with journalists. It makes sense. If the language of cinema is the way you communicate, then the language of cinema is the way you communicate, then the language of cinema is the way you communicate.

"ONE OF THE BEST MOVIES OF THE DECADE"

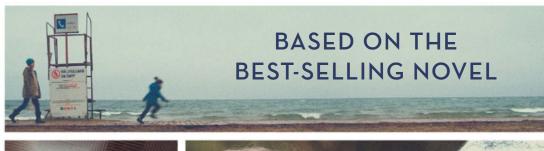
CHICAGO SUN-TIMES



"BRIE LARSON GIVES AN AWARDS-WORTHY PERFORMANCE"

"A ONE-OF-A-KIND, MUST-SEE EXPERIENCE"

NEW YORK POST











TELEFILM CANADA FILMA MA BORD SCANNÁN NA ÉRBANA/THE RISH FILM BORAD MUTERAMERKONA O VITABIO MENIA DEVELOPMENT COPPORATION II ELAMENT PICTURES / NO TRACE CAMPING PUNICIAN MASSIMINAM DIFERENCES II MAN ALEM SAN BROGERS III WILLIAM EL MACY """ FONA WER 20 DE 700M O COOK, 20 SEN EA CARLSON ""S ETEMEN REINICKS III MATERIAN DIEGELT "ESTE ELAN TORMAN MASSIMINAM ANDERE CAMPINA DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHINA DONOGHIE III ESTE SHAMBA DONOGHIE III ESTE SHAMBA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS "" E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS "" E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE ANDERE LOWE GOODS """ E EMMA DONOGHIE III ENTE AND I

IN CINEMAS JANUARY 15

LITTLE WHITE LIES PRESENTS

AN ALPHABETIC INDEX OF CINEMA'S MOST MARVELLOUS AND MEMORABLE FINAL MOVIES

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

NICHOLAS JOHN FRITH



INTRODUCTION

e take for granted that when we wake up of a morning, art will be there for us to consume. And, our favourite artists will be there, ready and willing, to serve this unquenchable desire. But time is a cruel mistress, and just as, say, a film director has to make a first movie, he or she will also have to make a final movie. Our cover film, Paolo Sorrentino's Youth, is about a retired conductor (played by Michael Caine) who is looking back over his life and working out which loose ends need tying, and which can remain forever frayed.

Little White Lies has decided to take 50 examples of cinematic swan songs and explore them individually in search of common themes and threads. On occasion, a director will accept their mortality, creating a work that translates into a grand statement on a life lived and a corpus completed. Other times, we see reliable filmmakers who treat creating art as a job - a way to pay the bills - and they continued to carry this out until they found themselves stiff in a box. There are also examples where tragedy intervenes to stop a great artist in their tracks, making what some may have seen as an exciting new direction into a unpredicted exclamation of finality.

— No.1 —

CHANTAL AKERMAN

NO HOME MOVIE (2015)

It seems sad to have to kick things off by writing about Chantal Akerman's No Home Movie, not least because its swan song status was calcified so recently and so abruptly. The film was booed at its press screening at the 2015 Locarno Film Festival, and opportunist hacks later crassly speculated that this had a direct link to the director's suicide two months later. Had those same hacks actually watched the film, they would've seen an extraordinarily moving and unguarded portrait of loneliness and existential bemusement as Akerman's beloved mother deteriorates physically and mentally in front of her hand-held camera. As final movies go, this one seems archetypal, drawing on her formative classics such as 1975's portrait of enforced domesticity, Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles, and more directly from 1977's magnificent News From Home, whose narration comprised of concerned letters from Akerman's mother as the director plied her trade in New York City. The opening long shot of a fragile tree being blown to breaking point by strong winds says it all. DAVID JENKINS

— No.2 —

ROBERT ALTMAN

A PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION (2006)

Much like Alain Resnais' Life Of Riley [see No. 40], a film which appears to acknowledge that its maker knows his time is almost up, Robert Altman's A Prairie Home Companion is a cavalcade of pure, downhome pleasure, but with a seriously bittersweet undertow. The film offers a fictional chronicle of Garrison Keillor's famous, long-running live radio broadcasts from which the film takes its title - a broad mixture of teatime comic high-jinx, gather-roundthe-hearth anecdotes, folk songs and miscellaneous merriment. The show we're watching is actually the final broadcast, and the old theatre in which it takes place is set for demolition the following morn. Convention would have it that some scheme needs to be executed to save the building and, by extension, preserve this grand old American tradition, but no-one seems that fussed about letting it slip away in the name of modernisation. Notable for a superb supporting turn by Lindsay Lohan, plus the patented Altman dialogue, which overlaps with itself like gentle waves as the tide flows out. DAVID JENKINS

— No.3 —

MICHAELANGELO ANTONIONI

THE DANGEROUS THREAD OF THINGS (2004)

Michelangelo Antonioni may not have known that *The Dangerous Thread of Things*, from the 2004 omnibus picture *Eros*, would be his final work. It's a take on those plotless, "pretentious" films about aimless rich people, and as a swan song, it fits the bill. At 91, the Italian titan was rendered incapable of speaking and partly paralysed by a stroke, but nevertheless produced this essentially

silent featurette, a woozy union of experience and perception that asks us to devote no less attention to a glass rolling across a restaurant floor than it does two lovers whose quarrelling is the only ostensible human subject matter. What's more important is that we look, hear and feel everything presented to us. The bizarre inner logic of the film becomes clear in the closing moments as nearly identical nude women observe one another on an empty beach — which may, all told, be the most purely serene moment in the director's entire oeuvre. NICK NEWMAN

— No.4 -

INGMAR BERGMAN

SARABAND (2003)

You can't keep a good man down, and having announced that 1982's Fanny and Alexander would be his final film, Ingmar Bergman came back for one last (gentle, observant and meticulous) roll of the dice. 2004's Saraband is an addendum to one of his great works - 1973's Scenes From A Marriage. Yet instead of diving straight back in to the sharp rhetorical parrying of that film - in which Liv Ullmann's Marianne and Erland Josephson's Johan argue for the best part of five hours - the stirring Saraband stages a reunion highlighting the hideous lives of offspring and kin and how our heroes may have failed as both partners and parents. The film opens and closes on Ullmann scanning a table of photographs and addressing the camera directly, and even though she was the emotional entry point in Scenes..., she professes to being lonely and unfulfilled despite her professional success. The film looks at Johan's son from another marriage and his daughter, the former a widower and both musicians with an unhealthily close relationship. There's an abundance of psychologically meaty material here, and Bergman, ever the light-fingered master, enhances it through making the film about how people interpret and deal with bonds they perhaps don't fully comprehend. DAVID JENKINS

— No.5 -

LUIS BUÑUEL

THAT OBSCURE OBJECT OF DESIRE (1977)

The final shot of Luis Buñuel's final feature sees its two main characters randomly blown up by terrorists. But the way it is shot (you only see a fiery mushroom cloud) you could construe this as the director gleefully detonating the entire planet as a mischievous parting shot. A cine-rascal til the last, Buñuel's Thαt Obscure Object of Desire is perhaps a belated mission statement, as many of the films within his exceptional canon focus on the idea of arrogant, entitled people being unable to fulfil simple desires. Here, Fernando Rey's wealthy flaneur Mathieu clasps his eyes on lissom maid Conchita during a dinner party (played in alternate scenes by Carole Bouquet and Ángela Molina) and decides that he must have her. Initial gentlemanly advances swiftly give way to bald financial transactions, though Conchita will simply not let Mathieu into her sewn-on girdle. It's a scalding tract on notions of social entitlement, machismo, pretension and those (men) who are so overwhelmed by their own lofty status that they can't see the world falling apart around them. DAVID JENKINS

— No.6 —

CLAUDE CHABROL

BELLAMY (2009)

Claude Chabrol almost made a film a year from 1958 until his death in 2010. Given how extraordinarily prolific he was, his final picture was never going to be a self-conscious swan song. And yet his death inevitably enhances certain traits in his work, elevating a deceptively simple policier to the state of elegy. The director considered Bellamy to be like a novel that Georges Simenon never wrote, a film in which Gérard Depardieu's titular police inspector finds himself drawn into a case while holidaying with his wife. Though Chabrol only made two direct Simenon adaptations, the author's spirit found its way into so much of his work. By creating his own version of Chief Inspector Maigret, Chabrol bridged the gap between Simenon's world and his own. The crime itself in Bellamy is almost a side note; as always, Chabrol's interest is in the hopes, fears and desires of his characters. As the critic Armond White noted, genre was Chabrol's MacGuffin. The film concludes with lines by WH Auden which speak not only to the events therein, but to Chabrol's entire body of work: "There's always another story / There is more than meets the eye". CRAIG WILLIAMS

— No.7 —

CHARLIE CHAPLIN

A COUNTESS FROM HONG KONG (1967)

Though hardly counted among Charlie Chaplin's great works when, indeed, it's counted at all - A Countess from Hong Kong is a far sharper sign-off than many think. In Countess, Chaplin himself has only a bit part, which is a little more than 1923's A Woman of Paris where the auteur-performer's presence was entirely absent. Some folks would be hard pressed to see a Chaplin film as a Chaplin film when the man himself is not smack-dab in the frame. And in this case, it's hard to blame them: wide-screen, colour, Marlon Brando in the lead - this is hardly the ingredients of a Chaplin classic. And yet, as critic Andrew Sarris claimed, it's "the quintessence of everything [Chaplin] has ever felt." This mournfully comic tale of an unhappy diplomat, his cold wife (Tippi Hedren) and a firecracker stowaway (a never-better Sophia Loren) is one of deep longing, encapsulating a clash between idealism and the cynical world of money and politics that threatens it. Career obsessions with class issues and the language of gesture, plus a sheer mastery of form make A Countess From Hong Kong one of his most deeply-felt films, the swan song of an old man who lived a life dashed with equal parts passion and disappointment. ADAM COOK

— No.8 —

SHIRLEY CLARKE

ORNETTE: MADE IN AMERICA (1985)

There's a documentary profile of the late, very great director, artist, activist and champion of independent film, Shirley Clarke, in which the camera darts around a throw pillow conversation circle. Jacques Rivette sits grinning as the star waxes poetic about her idiosyncratic project. This state of perceived comfort penetrated all of this unheralded director's film work, from crackling drug fix drama *The*



Connection, to florid confessional Portrait of Jason and on to her climactic documentary work, Ornette: Made In America, about free jazz saxophonist and composer, Ornette Coleman. This film, which innovates with form in the same way its subject did, is about the process of making music, but it's also about how artists talk about themselves and create an image they present to the world. Clarke's genial presence is journalistic though she never hectors, managing to tease out personal, private and profound details from Coleman, including the intertwining of his convention-busting musical odyssey with the fact that he once physically attempted to suppress all erotic desire from entering into body and mind. Clarke died in 1997, leaving behind a petit, ugly/beautiful body of work that we should cherish. DAVID JENKINS

— No.9 —

JACQUES DEMY

THREE SEATS FOR THE 26TH (1988)

The career of the late Jacques Demy can be sliced roughly down the middle. Everything from 1961's Lola to 1970's Donkey Skin is great, everything from 1972's The Pied Piper to his final film, Three Seats for the 26th, from 1988, is of variable quality. The stand-out in that shaky latter period is 1982's A Room In Town, though his of-its-time and hearteningly sincere swan song, Three Seats..., does have much to recommend it. The film is an electro-pop love letter to working class chanteur (and sometimes actor) Yves Montand, who has returned to his hometown of Marseilles to star in a gaudy musical extravaganza based on his life. Though this might seem of marginal interest to those not up with Montand, Demy's character becomes a personal surrogate, dredging up and exploring themes from the director's own classics - the melancholy rapture of French provincial living, fiery affairs extinguished by time and distance, reunions with family and loved ones through happenstance, and the sheer joy of singing and dancing in public. DAVID JENKINS

CARL THEODOR DREYER

GERTRUD (1964)

It's only after watching Carl Theodor Dreyer's imperious and imposing oeuvre in its entirety that you see that the director's project was one of refinement. He came tantalisingly close to finding the primordial essence of pure cinema on many occasions, not least in films like 1955's Ordet and 1928's The Passion of Joan of Arc. However, it's his gently devastating parting shot, Gertrud, which stands as his most breathtaking, nuanced and radical masterstroke. "A woman's love and a man's work are mortal enemies." It's a garish, off-hand sentiment which nevertheless colours the life of tormented society dame, Gertrud (Nina Pens Rode), whose search for a form of pure and selfless love goes tragically unfounded. Though theatrical in its basic scene construction, Dreyer's shattering masterpiece is boldly cinematic in its composition and lightly expressionistic in its performances. During long dialogues actors stare not at each other, but into some mysterious middle distance void, in a film about the impossibility of attaining strict gender equality in heterosexual relationships and, thus, being unable to see eye to eye. The film was loathed when it was originally released - dismissed as antiquated and stuffy. It has, of course, since grown to be recognised one of modern cinema's most emotionally bracing achievements. DAVID JENKINS

— No.11 —

SERGEI EISENSTEIN

IQUE VIVA MEXICO! (1979)

The godfather of the modern movie montage set fire to his own playbook in this Mexican adventure which cinema lore dismissed as a muffed-up folly. Though intended as a puff-piece quickie by the film's local producers and paymasters, Eisenstein had other ideas. He shot away to his heart's content and - on the evidence

of the morass of images – tried to tell the unvarnished truth about an impoverished country in the midst of political and cultural upheaval. While features such as Battleship Potemkin represent the innovations of early cinema, iQue viva México! comes across as a film that could've been made in the 21st century. And that's not a comment on its subject, more an admission that it feels sprightly and modern. Some commentators have even pegged it as an early surrealist film. Pooh-poohed by some because Eisenstein's footage was belatedly edited by one of his creative partners, Grigori Alexandrov, and thus not "strictly" part of the director's body of work, it remains a fascinating and singular film, whatever its auterist credentials may be. DAVID JENKINS

— No.12 —

NORA EPHRON

JULIA AND JULIA (2009)

Rom-com queen Nora Ephron directed just eight films, though she wrote twice as many (The 2000 John Travolta flop Lucky Numbers was the only one she directed but didn't write herself.) Her last film, 2009's Julie and Julia, focused on the parallel careers of two women, sidelining the love stories on which she made her name. Yet in many ways, this film is the most personal the writer-director ever made. Firstly, it reunited her with long-time muse Meryl Streep with whom she collaborated as writer on Silkwood and Heartburn. Secondly, it gave her the chance to pay cinematic homage to a subject she regularly wrote about in both newspapers and novels: Food. Set against the backdrop of post 9/11 New York, it follows the gastronomic journeys of food blogger Julie Powell (Amy Adams) and her culinary inspiration, the celebrity chef Julia Child (Meryl Streep) - both sous-chef their respective ways to self-actualisation. While Julie and Julia perhaps doesn't offer the same pleasures as Ephron's classic romance films - sadly absent are the autumn leaves and Lubitsch-esque screwball patter - it does argue that women amount to more than their love lives. SIMRAN HANS



— No.13 —

RAINER WERNER FASSBINDER

QUERELLE (1982)

There would have been a certain grim poetry had *Veronika Voss* been the great Rainer Werner Fassbinder's final film. It concerns a crumbling celebrity whose drug dependency expedites her tragic demise. But instead it was to be *Querelle*, made in 1982 from a beautifully lurid book by Jean Genet and released after the director's death in June of that year. With its snow-globe set design – a Brest port lined with phallic bollards – and a dreamy choral soundtrack by the director's long-time musical collaborator, Peer Raben, the film stands alone within the director's oeuvre as a fantastical fairytale with gay romantic trappings. It's almost like a more brassily subversive Jean Cocteau movie. It's possibly Fassbinder's most invigoratingly visual film, one in which every fight, every act of aggression and flurry of naked passion translates into a dance or mating ritual. Bodies glisten in the golden sunsets, and Fassbinder uses every trick in the book (and some new ones) to enter the mind of his murderous hero. **DAVID JENKINS**

— No.14 —

JOHN FORD

7 WOMEN (1966)

Spoiler: the closing scene from John Ford's 7 Women is one of the greatest final sequence of any filmmaker's career. The icy, life-hardened protagonist DR Cartwright (a marvellously brash Anne Bancroft), is in an impossible situation and held captive at a Christian mission. Having handily picked apart the foundations of the mission's residents, one value at a time, she then sacrifices her life to save the people around her. At odds with the seven women of the film's title (she not counted among them), the atheistic DR is brought in as a desperately needed doctor, and not long after her arrival, a company of Mongolian savages take over. She offers herself as a concubine to their leader to spare the others, a great example of a lone Fordian outsider acting on behalf of the greater good. Ford spent a lifetime looking at how individuals find their place within society at large, and with 7 Women he arrives at a troubling and powerful act of martyrdom, thus closing a rich oeuvre on a note of devout existentialism - abruptly turning away from society or nation, and towards a relationship with one's self and the universe. Like so many last films, this one concerns death - not ageing, but dying, and by extension, how to live. Every moment is integral to its purpose, communicating emotions and ideas with devastating aplomb. A swig of poison, the extinguishing of a light, the ignition of Ford's most bluntly philosophical proposition. The End. ADAM COOK

— No.15 —

BOB FOSSE

STAR 80 (1983)

Bob Fosse's most substantial legacy is as a Broadway choreographer/director, but his five feature films suggest that theatre's gain was cinema's loss. His debut, Sweet Charity is strong, and Cabaret, Lenny and All That Jazz are Best Director-nominated touchstones (he won

for Cabaret). And then there's Star 80, as close to overlooked as a film representing one fifth of an Oscar-winning director's output can be. Delivering a tabloid-sleaze salacious story with extraordinary compassion and insight, it tells of the tawdry murder of 1980 'Playmate of the Year' Dorothy Stratten (Mariel Hemingway) by her estranged husband Paul Snider (Eric Roberts). The performances are outstanding: Roberts' Snider is a volatile cocktail of fury and inadequacy, embodying the inchoate violence of a Travis Bickle and the hopeless famewhoreishness of a Rupert Pupkin (reportedly, Fosse once circled The King of Comedy). And Hemingway is a revelation, heartbreakingly evoking Stratten's dawning self-worth that wars with her misguided sense of gratitude, en route to an almost unwatchably visceral climax. Fosse had plans to direct other films that never came to fruition, but Star 80 deserves to be reclaimed as an uncompromising example of his chilling, incisive investigations into fame, image and destructive ego. JESSICA KIANG

— No.16 -

YILMAZ GÜNEY

YOL (1982)

There's never been another filmmaker like Yilmaz Güney. On-screen the Kurdish-born firebrand specialised in moody Brandoesque roles in the '6Os. He then wrote and directed his own politicised neorealist movies, becoming an insurgent voice who was repeatedly imprisoned by military authorities throughout the following decade. Sentenced again for the murder of a state prosecutor, he continued writing scripts in prison (which were then shot clandestinely by his assistant Serif Gören), among them Yol, the joint winner of the 1982 Cannes Palme d'Or. To date, he's the only prizewinner to turn up having escaped from jail, allegedly pursued by Interpol. While in France he made one more film before dying suddenly of cancer, aged 57. Yol remains his testament. It's no fist-pumping call to arms but a despairing picture of what he called 'the moral debris left behind by feudalism and patriarchy'. Following various prisoners allowed home on leave, Güney shows us a Turkey gripped by army checkpoints, locked in a virtual civil war, yet choked just as much by its own repressive moral values and ingrained traditionalism. Complex, challenging and magnificently authentic, it's a film to leave us asking why none of his work is readily available on DVD. TREVOR JOHNSTON

— No.17 —

HOWARD HAWKS

RIO LOBO (1970)

Of their five collaborations, *Rio Lobo* remains the picture for which Howard Hawks and John "The Duke" Wayne are least likely to be remembered. And rightly so. Hawks' indifference to his material extends far beyond his complete abandonment of the film immediately after shooting. He flew straight to Palm Springs and played no part in its editing. The often wince-inducing, in-camera sloppiness feels a far cry from both the drum-tight rhythms of his '3Os and '4Os work, and the shaggy-dog looseness of his post-*Rio Bravo* best. Hawks brought in writer Leigh Brackett for a third (after *El Dorado*) reconfiguration of *Rio Bravo*'s jailhouse standoff, but even the most ardent Hawksian would struggle to find

much of interest beyond the most rote variations on this theme. The opening train heist is handsomely mounted, but more often than not *Rio Lobo* feels like a half-hearted last stand; an anachronistic fuck you to the young turks riding in on horseback and motorcycle. John Wayne huffing, puffing and slapping women's arses remains a craggy monolith carved from unreconstructed oak, but when Hawks famously said of *The Wild Bunch*, "I can kill four men, take 'em to the morgue, and bury 'em before he gets one to the ground in slow-motion," few who agreed could be thinking of *Rio Lobo*. MATT THRIFT

— No.18 —

ALFRED HITCHCOCK

FAMILY PLOT (1976)

It's incredible to think that Alfred Hitchcock's directorial career started before Buster Keaton's The General and ended in the year of Martin Scorsese's Taxi Driver. He was a silent pioneer and British maverick before developing into the signature stylist of his Hollywood prime. By the second half of the '6Os, though, he'd clearly peaked, and while 1972's Frenzy marked a viciously provocative return to London, by then young pups like Brian De Palma were delivering better mock-Hitchcock than the old man might have managed. Which is why the jaunty, decidedly urbane Family Plot is such a surprise, a gentle caper entangling a fake spiritualist and a fiendish diamond thief, its essentially comedic tone took Hitch back to '30s British larks like Young and Innocent or The Lady Vanishes. True, the pace is certainly deliberate, yet the movie's far from old fashioned, since the cast bring a quintessentially '70s New Hollywood vibe to it. What with goofball vixen Karen Black in a blonde wig, Bruce Dern doing full-on whimsical as an inquisitive cabbie, and William Devane suave yet scary as the volatile villain, it's a Hitchcock movie with a flavour like no other. Not a bad way for the 77-year-old to bow out. TREVOR JOHNSTON

— No.19 —

JOHN HUGHES

CURLY SUE (1991)

The cliché of the beloved director going out to seed, or losing his way in the final furlongs of an otherwise star-spangled career, is all present and correct in the case of John Hughes' Curly Sue. It's a film that's so sickeningly sentimental that not even prattling Chicago dough-boy Jim Belushi can help toughen it up. And yet, watching it now, there is a defensible husk at the core of this story of two noble transients. It's about Belushi's Bob and his frizzily-mopped daughter, Sue (Alisan Porter), who makes up in mildly astringent barkeep patter what she lacks in formal education. Kelly Lynch's basic bitch lawyer takes pity on these lovable hucksters, and the film transforms into an essay on class consciousness which questions whether there is any way to bridge the cultural and economic chasms of '90s America. There's a sequence where the three go and see a Looney Tunes cartoon in the cinema (screening in 3D?), and Hughes attempts to leaven the film's violent overtones by synching in comedy sound effects when characters are, say, run over, receive a serious head injury, or are simply booted in the swingers. We know how you feel, John... DAVID JENKINS



— No.20 —

JOHN HUSTON

THE DEAD (1987)

Despite tackling a number of literary adaptations throughout his career, John Huston certainly saved his toughest customer for last. His final film would be The Dead, taken from James Joyce's collection of short fiction, 'The Dubliners'. By this point in his life, Huston considered himself an honorary Irishman having bought land and set up home at St Clerans outside Galway. One can feel the affection for his adopted country coursing through the film. It's easy to see why Huston was tempted, given the sense of bittersweet celebration and doomed masculinity found in the text. Yet Joyce remains a writer whose work remains resistant to screen adaptation, and there's little in Huston's visual style that suggests previous success with such literary introspection. So it's remarkable that a film as often lumberingly flat-footed as The De αd - see the dance sequence - should also find such lucid moments of poignancy and grace, rendered all the more powerful by the fact they appear out of nowhere. Aided immeasurably by DoP Fred Murphy's whiskey-dipped glow, and wonderful performances from Anjelica Huston and Donal Donnelly, it's in quieter moments that The Dead soars more so than in the literalism of its overtly poetic finale. A small film of overwhelming power, you can feels Huston's kinship with Joyce's closing passage: "Better to pass boldly into that other world in the full glory of some passion than fade and wither dismally with age." MATT THRIFT

SATOSHI KON

PAPRIKA (2006)

The tragedy of Satoshi Kon's sudden demise to pancreatic cancer is the feeling that as a filmmaker, he was only just warming up. That's not to say that titles already in the can such as 1997's Hitchcockian J-Pop satire, Perfect Blue, or 2001's exploration of Japan's classicera leading ladies, Millennium Actress, weren't brilliant in their own right. It's that Pαprikα seemed to anticipate and out-class Christopher Nolan's Inception by some four years, and with it, Kon had passed through the looking glass, had found a way to make a purely experimental movie that carried the base emotional conventions of straight drama. The film is about a contraption used to enter into the dreams of others with the aim of fixing psychological maladies. It gets into the wrong hands and all hell breaks loose. Kon's handling of this interior battle between good and evil sets fire to the rule book then tosses the ashes into a canyon. The world and the movie business desperately need those whose ideas are unshackled from the bounds of banal human experience - people who can dream big and not stupid. Kon was one of the very best before he was snatched from us. DAVID JENKINS

— No.22 —

STANLEY KUBRICK

EYES WIDE SHUT (1999)

Even Kubrick's comedies are schematic and grandiose. His last film was elegantly, mysteriously so. In stately Steadicam shots, Tom Cruise's lucky, limited doctor wanders a backlot New York that, with its Christmas lights and stilted interactions, is like a waking dream. Haunted by wife Nicole Kidman's confession of an emotional life beyond his understanding, he chases a conspiracy of platonic shadows, whose Fellini-esque masked orgies offer tempting flickers of authentic knowledge. Eyes Wide Shut is the culmination of the late-9Os run of brain-in-a-jar sci-fi flicks – Dark City, The Thirteenth Floor, The Matrix, virtual realities hinted at by moviemovie production design – crossed with Paul Bowles's philosophy of death as transcendent truth: "Reach out, pierce the fine fabric of the sheltering sky, take repose." Yet the film's final moments are as touchingly earthy as any in Kubrick's career. MARK ASCH

— No.23 —

AKIRA KUROSAWA

MADADAYOU (1993)

It seems fitting that Madadayo would be Kurosawa's final film, given its reflective nature. A gentle tale of a much-loved professor's autumn years, it's a quietly profound work that eschews the filmmaker's characteristic propulsive narratives for something more contemplative, its title (meaning, "Not yet!") a battle cry taken from scenes of lively birthday celebrations at which his students ask if he's ready to die. It's not the first of Kurosawa's films to tackle questions of mortality, but neither does it frame its protagonist's impending shuffle in explicitly sentimental terms like his earlier *lkiru*. There are no life lessons to be learned here, beyond the good humour and

grace with which Tatsuo Matsumura's professor awaits the inevitable. Flowing with all the properties of a final sigh, Kurosawa switches out his muscular editing patterns for a series of fades to black, his interior compositions more often appearing to echo the poise of his contemporary, Yasujiro Ozu than himself. An expressionistic final sequence can't help but take on the sense of cinematic valediction for one of its true master craftsmen. MATT THRIFT

— No.24 —

JERRY LEWIS

CRACKING UP (1983)

No, this 1983 Hollywood comedy doesn't begin with Chevy, Eddie or Bill Murray making a pratfall accompanied to their star billing, but rather the words: "Jerry... Who Else?". Despite America's efforts to leave its clown laureate to the French, Jerry Lewis was back for one last directorial effort in which he stars as Warren Nefron, a klutz of apocalyptic proportions. In other words, a Jerry Lewis character. Yet the predicament that separates Nefron from Lewis' other screen nerds like The Nutty Professor's Julius Kelp or Herbert H Heebert from The Ladies Man isn't based on the need for attention from a pretty girl - a motif that led to accusations of misogyny and narcissism throughout his career. What Nefron hilariously fails at again and again through his klutziness is killing himself. Despite his inability to exit stage left as a performer and icon, Cracking Up didn't end up being a testament to his immortality, but rather a bittersweet swan song. While the lack of a follow-up could be chalked up to Lewis' poor health (he suffered a heart attack while in post-production) or likelier, the film's lack of commercial appeal (it went straight-to-cable in the United States), it's fitting that his finale embodies his famed belief that there was no gap between comedy and tragedy. ETHAN VESTBY

— No.25 —

JOSEPH L MANKIEWICZ

SLEUTH (1972)

Despite a career that spanned four decades, which saw him win writing and directing Oscars two years running (for A Letter From Three Wives and All About Eve) Joseph L Mankiewicz is rarely mentioned in the same reverent tones as the Hitchcocks, Wilders and Fords of Hollywood's classic era. The diversity of his output and his unobtrusive visual style perhaps make him less readily identifiable as an auteur (although Jean-Luc Godard's first published criticism was a laudatory 1950 overview of Mankiewicz's career). But one recurring Mankiewicz trait is dialogue that often yields great performances. To that end, Sleuth is a fitting grace note. Based on Anthony Schaffer's play, it's about the cat-and-mouse games between a wealthy mystery novelist (Laurence Olivier) and his estranged wife's callow lover (Michael Caine). It's a tricksy. theatrical, not particularly "deep" film, and since its central gimmick cannot work a second time (and not even a first time really, to a Caine-literate modern audience), it could feel stagy and somewhat disposable. But because of Mankiewicz' particular talents, Sleuth is in fact highly rewatchable, as two crackling performances deliver Schaffer's witty, baroque words with just the right amount of selfaware ham. JESSICA KIANG

IN LOVING MEMORY

R.I.P.

WORDS BY

PETER LABUZA

SOMETIMES,
MOVIE DIRECTORS
DIE BEFORE THEY
CAN REALISE
ALL OF THE
CINEMATIC DRAMS.
WE OFFER
SPECULATIVE
REVIEWS OF THE
SWAN SONGS THAT
NEVER WERE.

GOD'S PRECIOUS GIFT

ROBERT BRESSON

GENESIS

The French director Robert Bresson certainly made genre films in his time (Pickpocket; Lancelot Du Lac), but his mooted epic involving the creation of the universe, Genesis, falls into a category of its own. Avoiding digital effects, Bresson relies on abstract flashes of light and a meticulous melody of sounds to imagine Earth's first days. Adam (Jean-Pierre Leaud) and Eve (Catherine Deneuve) walk solemnly through a Technicolor painted garden with their many, astonishingly expressive animal costars (plus Jean-Luc Godard voicing the serpent). But while the film's physical elements are astonishing, the immense tragedy of the film's ending - a 10 minute conversation with an absent God - creates cinematic, spiritual catharsis.

RIP

KING HU

THE BATTLE OF ONO

Kung Fu and the Western have always shared affiliations, but it took martial arts master King Hu to truly demonstrate the oddity of Hong Kong cinema with Hu's 1997 Western The Battle of Ono. Set along a railroad, Chow Yun-Fat stars as the leader of a group of immigrants who take arms against their ruthless overseers (Clint Eastwood and Paul Newman) in a gun-meets-sword battle for freedom. Hu's intense spiritualism finds an ancillary in Tony Leung's patriotic speeches about their rights to Americans democracy, while the action unfolds at a meticulously crafted pace, swinging from highly energetic to slowly deliberate - resulting in perhaps the best crossover genre film maybe ever made.

IISSION

IN SACRED MEMORY

OTTO PREMINGER

BLOOD ON THE WHEELS

The first American film shot in China, Otto Preminger's period epic Blood on the Wheels had perhaps as much effect on Chinese-American relations as Nixon's 1972 trade visit. Stacy Keach stars as Canadian doctor Norman Bethune travels to China to aid the resistance during World War Two. But the real invention within the film are the intense flash-forwards the doctor has, all involving Chairman Mao. Mao portrays himself in lenghy debate scenes which cover politics, science, religion, and more, with Preminger's camera constantly readjusting the staging between each switch-up of subject. The director keeps a curiously even hand in terms of the film's politics, punctuating the verbiage with battle sequences that rival any Vietnam film of the era.

DEAR DEPARTED

ANDREI TARKOVSKY

THE IDIOT

It seems only appropriate that Russian master Andrei Tarkovsky would end his career with a comedy, making his only German film after the fall of the Berlin Wall. His modern retelling of Dostoevsky's The Idiot follows Prince Myshkin (an unknown Christoph Waltz), who has returned from an asylum somewhere in the West and falls under the crafty persuasion of his distant cousin-inlaw Yepanchin, a former Stasi agent played with zany bravado by Klaus Kinski, Myshkin understands little of Yepanchin's scheme for a government takeover through marrying off his young daughters, but Tarkovsky finds bitter black humour as he captures the poverty on the streets of the reunified Berlin. His long take approach may feel ill-suited to such material, but the film finds a balance between the almost screwball dialogue and the harsh realism that plays out in the background, asking questions such as where the artist fits into this new, notso-free state.

IN LOVING MEMORY

JACQUES TATI

CONFUSION

It was only inevitable that after the geometric shapes of Playtime and Trafic, Jacques Tati would literally turn his himself into a pattern of squares. In Confusion, Tati is killed on television and then reborn through the medium, as two American TV engineers (Ron and Russel Mael of the band Sparks) redesign Paris through mapping new technology into its every corner, essentially turning it into a real life social media platform. While Tati saw the poetry inherent in regimented modern society, it feels ironic that he views the computing world with utopic freedom (think Daft Punk meets WALL-E), bursting the screen into a dazzling show of audio-visual encounters into which he integrates some of the most sophisticated uses of early digital effects.



— No.26 –

LEO MCCAREY

SATAN NEVER SLEEPS (1962)

Having made a name as a maestro of film comedy, with the likes of Marx brothers' classic Duck Soup and The Awful Truth on his CV, Leo McCarey struck out big time in his twilight years with a string of whimsical faith-based "comedies" which are almost wholly lacking in the rapier sharp irony and visual exuberance of yore. In an interview with Peter Bogdanovich, McCarey admitted to not only despising the three stars of the awfully titled Satan Never Sleeps - William Holden, Clifton Webb and France Nuyen - but the actual production of the film itself, bowing out five days before it was completed and leaving the tidy-up to an assistant. The film's staggeringly non-PC plotline would likely cause the internet to implode if something of its ilk released today, with Holden's rugged Christian missionary holed up in revolutionary China to spread the good word, while his trouser chasing cook (Nuyen) is raped by a Communist boot boy. The film is then about how Holden and fellow priest Webb go about rehabilitating the Communist so he can raise the child that he forced upon his unwitting female prey. The final shot sees rapist and victim christening their child and laughing heartily [sound of skin crawling]. DAVID JENKINS

— No.27 —

ALEXANDER MACKENDRICK

DON'T MAKE WAVES (1967)

I remember going to see *Don't Make Waves* at the London's BFI Southbank, the decision to head down more because I wanted to watch something, anything, than any great affinity with its director, Alexander McKendrick. His "great" movies - *The Ladykillers* or *Sweet Smell of Success* - never really did it for me, so the impulse to make a point of catching *Don't Make Waves* was mystifying to say the least. The film ended up being a major hoot, a riotous parody of flesh-parading west coast surf pictures which can now be seen as an important forerunner to Paul Thomas Anderson's *Inherent Vice*. "Turn on! Stay loose! Make out!" read the poster tagline for a film which sees Tony Curtis' New York journo forcibly dunked into the deep end of seafront hippy

culture, free love, surfing, sky diving, and a beachfront houses with poor foundations. It's a very funny and flip film which miraculously manages to sustain its wild sense of humour until the last. Even though *Don't Make Waves* was made in 1967, MacKendrick never made another film, instead accepting a cushy job at the famous Cal Arts institute as the Dean of Film, and died in 1993 at the ripe old age of 91. **DAVID JENKINS**

— No.28 —

JEAN-PIERRE MELVILLE

UN FLIC (1972)

Not to second guess the sleuthing skills of our readers, but were you to watch Jean-Pierre Melville's Un Flic shorn of all context, it's unlikely that you'd guess it was the director's final movie. There's the sense that he's attempting to court a more mainstream audience, as it not only boasts two of France's most beloved stars - Alain Delon and Catherine Deneuve - but Rambo's Colonel Trautman himself, Richard Crenna, potentially in a bid to lure in American cinema-goers. The story of a team of crooks bungling a bank robbery and, later, a drug heist on a moving train, does that Melvillian thing of lightly romanticising the skillsets of cads and robbers while celebrating the intricate and exotic processes they develop to execute their schemes. In the film's central set piece, Crenna is lowered onto a moving train from a helicopter, and stealthily breaks into a compartment to nab two briefcases full of drugs. To bring this scene to the screen, Melville uses some sneaky illusions of his own, bringing in a model train set, remote control helicopter and smoke machine to offer an effect without shattering through budget constraints. In that sense, this is an impressionistic gangster film - a story of debonair crooks that's been made by one. DAVID JENKINS

— No.29 —

RUSS MEYER

BENEATH THE VALLEY OF THE ULTRA VIXENS (1979)

When it comes to cracking through the smiley façade of American picket fenced suburbia to reveal violence, vice and transgression, David Lynch is your go-to guy. However, roistering bosom man Russ

Meyer used his final movie to assure that if you enter into any house on any street in what he and screenwriter Roger Ebert refer to as "Small town America", you'll be party to scenes that are hotter than a Mexican's lunch. Junkyard dogs, religious radio announcers, blue-eyed decathletes and horny, hairy clock punchers manage to find ways to slot aggressive sex into their daily routines. It's an openly, barbarically lewd picture, but Meyer manages to transform the material into a work which wouldn't look out of place as a video installation at an art gallery. Every shot is intricately framed, and the exuberant editing patterns and detailed visual coverage suggest a man with a precise vision of what he wanted to achieve. At the climax of this breathless sex montage movie, Meyer himself appears, realising that his entire crew has walked out on him. The randy bulldog of big screen titilation bids a fond, personal farewell to his audience, as their eyeballs are harvested by the demon of cheap, tacky, mass-market VHS bongo. DAVID JENKINS

— No.30 —

KENJI MIZOGUCHI

STREET OF SHAME (1956)

It's rare that anyone would associate Kenji Mizoguchi's films with anything close to cheeriness, but even a familiarity with his dark work wouldn't prepare a viewer for his final film, Street of Shame. Moving away from the period settings of his best-known work and into the modern world, Mizoguchi put his eye — an eye that, above all else, understands the visual significance of myth and iconography — on a matter that few, even 60 years on, will directly confront: sex work, prostitutes, and the unfathomable pain that their lives can yield. The fusion of clean framing and editing with legitimate horrors make this film even more tragic in how they hint at what work might have followed. It's one of the great dramas of postwar Japan, a film that can be turned over and debated even to this day. **NICK NEWMAN**

— No.31 —

MIKIO NARUSE

SCATTERED CLOUDS (1967)

When we talk about the grand masters of postwar Japanese cinema, two names often arise: Yasujiro Ozu and Kenji Mizoguchi. Thanks to DVDs and clandestine networks of online cinephiles, Mikio Naruse is now a name that can be added to that extremely refined list. Scattered Clouds (aka Two In The Shadow) is Naruse's parting gesture, and there's no doubt that it stands up as a film which deserves a place alongside the likes of Ozu's Tokyo Story or Mizoguchi's Ugetsu Monogatari. It follows a theme the director often returned to: the idea of two people being in love with one another, but never both at the same time. Mishima (Yûzû Kayama) accidentally runs over and kills a man who happens to be the fiance of Yôko Tsukasa's Yumiko. He agrees to pay her financial support by way of an apology, and over time, an impossible love blossoms. However cordial and loving this man can be, will the association with death ever escape him? Are people fated to be defined by their actions? And can we suppress those dark associations in the name of love? Naruse's diplomatic answer to this question is that humans are beautiful and complex creatures, and to answer that conundrum would be unlock the secret to life itself. DAVID JENKINS

MANOEL DE OLIVEIRA

GEBO AND THE SHADOW (2012)

A friend's remark that the economic crisis should compel him to make a film about poverty was the reported inspiration for Manoel de Oliveira's final film, Gebo and the Shadow. It is worth mentioning, however, that his very first film in 1931, Labor on the Douro River, was a look at industry and poverty in his hometown of Porto, Portugal. A silent short portrait of a town, Labor... could not be more different from Gebo, a feature-length, digitally shot, single-setting story with four main characters and just nine in total. Gebo includes numerous shots that run for 15 minutes and are lit without the excessive artificial lighting that shooting on film demands. It is no coincidence, then, that light becomes the film's central metaphor, with sunlight signalling the isolated family's entrance into a world of corruption. Eighty years did not stop the 103-year-old director from turning the specific properties of new technology into his film's defining virtues. Nothing suggests the work of a master, like an exit so similar and yet so different to his entrance almost a century earlier. FORREST CARDAMENIS

— No.33 -

MAX OPHÜLS

LOLA MONTÈS (1955)

Critic Andrew Sarris once declared, "Lola Montès is, in my unhumble opinion, the greatest film of all time." But upon its release it was critically maligned and for years only a heavily cut version was screened. Told through flashbacks, Lola Montès is a romance that focuses on the beats of regret. It's about this fantastic woman who did fantastic things and fell in love with fantastic men, but lived to see it all fall apart. As one of the true great tragedies of the screen, the film uses shrill audio and visual flourishes to raise Lola to the realm of mythology. Like Icarus, who flew too close to the sun, the camera itself does the impossible in charting Montes' rise and fall. Ophüls' work, which has always involved a moving and spinning camera, never felt so magical and so effortless. While the film has a grand scope, spanning many decades and crossing continents, its greatest appeal lies in its intimacy with Montes' passion and solitude. JUSTINE SMITH

— No.34 —

NAGISA OSHIMA

GOHATTO (1999)

The title translates as Taboo, prime territory for director Nagisa Oshima until ill-health eventually ended his filmmaking career. Having deconstructed narrative as he dismantled Japanese social mores, Oshima brought hardcore sex into the arthouse mainstream with Empire of the Senses and paired Charlotte Rampling with a frisky simian in Max, Mon Amour. Where could he go after all that? To some extent Gohatto revisits the homoeroticism in war which marked 1982's Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence, here framed within a historical drama about the pro-Shogun militia, the Shinsengumi. The rigid discipline that is key to their operation is destabilised by the arrival of androgynous Ryûhei Matsuda, who stirs yearning throughout the ranks, even in stoic lieutenant Takeshi Kitano.

— No.37 —

Oshima teases with hints of conventional action choreography and writhing physicality, yet his approach also matches the military's controlling mindset by deliberately withholding key scenes and filling story ellipses with pared-down intertitles. This distancing effect forces us to consider the story's contemporary ideological relevance, most strikingly in the climactic slashing of a cherry tree suggesting that modern Japan's rigid social consensus is at odds with its own unruly desire for beauty. Far from Oshima's most ferocious offering, yet its steely resolve is rewarding. TREVOR JOHNSTON

No.35 -

PIER PAOLO PASOLINI

SALO, OR THE 120 DAYS OF SODOM (1975)

One of the most controversial films ever made, Salo, or the 120 Days of Sodom was Pier Paolo Pasolini's critique of Italian fascism, and it encapsulates his communist and anarchist views held throughout his career. Pasolini was murdered shortly after the film was completed, with suspicions that he was targeted because of his politics. Based on a story by the Marquis de Sade, whose philosophy celebrated hedonism, Pasolini associates the pursuit of pleasure with evil. If absolute power corrupts absolutely, then upper classes, comfortable in their material wealth, inevitably dehumanise and abuse those who beneath them? Challenging audiences by featuring young victims beaten, used as slaves and forced to eat their own faeces, Pasolini's film dares us to look away. The rise of hedonism suggests that fascism is not a quirk of "evil" but is possibly ingrained in human nature, or at the very least a symptom of capitalism. Evil in the film is a scapegoat, a way to explain away our responsibility. The horror of Salo is that it does not exist outside the realm of possibility – it is a heightened reflection of the evils of which we are all capable. JUSTINE SMITH

— No.36 —

MAURICE PIALAT

LE GARÇU (1995)

Situated far from the working-class milieu of his first film, 1968's L'Enface Nue, Maurice Pialat's final work stars his favourite actor, Monsieur Depardieu as (who else) Gerard, a charismatic, quasibourgeois with his attention divided between his 4-year-old son, Antoine, his ex-wife Sophie, and his various girlfriends. Life is further complicated by his potential romantic adversary, Jeannot – Sophie's new partner. While on his occasional visits he may shower his son with gifts and retain at least some form of connection with Sophie, as someone settling into middle-age, Gerard's tenuous relationships can't help but make his happiness utterly uncertain. Yet even with all the required emotional turmoil, Pialat creates levity through bouts of movement, such as a dancehall sequence from his otherwise appropriately downbeat biopic. Van Goah, which sees a modern day equivalent in a synchronised waltz scored to both Bjork's 'Human Behavior' and, yes, Corona's 'The Rhythm of the Night'. Simpler, if just as effective; Gerard taking his far-too-small son around on his motorcycle, or Antoine in his new toy car noisily circling around his mother's spacious apartment. These are, in pure Pialat fashion, the kind of brief snippets of time that only heighten the sting of the eventual and far-too-abrupt cut to black. ETHAN VESTBY

NICOLAS RAY

LIGHTNING OVER WATER (1980)

For a director who spent much of his career exploring the concept of crumbling manhood, this courageous kiss-off, which was co-directed by Wim Wenders, sees Nicolas Ray turning the camera on to himself. Riddled with cancer, but never without a smouldering cigarillo between his lips, the physically fragile legend muses artfully and obliquely on his career and his impending expiration, all the while playfully slipping between reality and artifice, delirium and calm. The title refers to a film Ray wants to make about a man who sails to China to find a cure for his mysterious ailment. Shots and motifs are explained to Wenders, who attempts to recreate fragments in posthumous reverence to his friend and mentor. While Ray remains understandably cantankerous, dryly humorous and invigoratingly poetic through the film's first half, his health starts to falter as the film comes to its frenzied close, and the unmatchably sad final take is just a shot of Ray – with eye patch – monologuing incoherently before aggressively daring the cameraman to cut. **DAVID JENKINS**

— No.38 —

SATYAJIT RAY

THE STRANGER (1991)

Satyajit Ray knew The Stranger was going to be his final film. Still suffering from the debilitating effects of a heart attack years earlier, Ray wrote the screenplay in his sick bed and directed much of the production from inside an oxygen tent. Despite the knowledge of his death being imminent, The Stranger is not presented as a grand final statement; instead, Ray's last work is an intimate and engaging character-driven drama set almost entirely within the confines of a single location. His story is a simple one that accumulates metaphorical weight. Utpal Dutt is the stranger of the title, a man who unexpectedly turns up at the home of middle class couple Anila and Sudhindra (Mamata Shankar and Dipankar Dey), claiming to be Anila's uncle, a long-forgotten character who left the family 35 years earlier to explore the world. As the sceptical family interrogates this interloper, he spins them a series of tales from his global travels, none of which make clearer whether he is who he claims to be, or if he's simply a very skilled conman. In fact, it is those asking the questions who end up revealing more of themselves through this process. Throughout The Stranger Ray observes his characters at close quarters, his camera moving around the family home with effortless grace. His ability to find humour and pathos in every human interaction had not deserted him at this late stage. The Stranger might be viewed as a minor work, far from the scale of Ray's masterpieces, but it is a rich and engrossing film about trust, judgement, understanding and - fittingly for this great director - the power of storytelling. PHIL CONCANNON

— No.39 —

JEAN RENOIR

THE LITTLE THEATRE OF JEAN RENOIR (1970)

The Little Theatre of Jean Renoir gets barely a page of consideration in the French director's brilliant and eloquent memoir, 'My Life and My Films'. When mentioning it he channels a certain frustration, as



this trio of short moral tales (plus a midpoint sing-song) was made for TV after, "seven years of unwilling inactivity". Having set his own creative bar stratospherically high with classics like *The Rules of the Game, The Grand Illusion* and *The River,* it's hard to see this climactic statement as more than a compendium of odds and ends. But the film was put together with the same verve and essential human compassion that characterised everything the great man put his hand to. The second chapter is a bizarre techno-operetta, and the finale is a moderately successful colloquial farce. Though it's the surprising opening chapter that hits home the hardest, initially looking like a sentimental live-action Disney film about the fantasies of homeless pensioners left in the snow for Christmas. Just as you think they're going to rise up out of their riverside hovel, they freeze to death, their belongings are stolen and the film ends. **DAVID JENKINS**

– No.40 –

ALAIN RESNAIS

LIFE OF RILEY (2014)

When Life of Riley premiered in competition at the 2014 Berlin Film Festival, even seasoned Resnais acolytes were left a little underwhelmed by this self-consciously theatrical Alan Ayckbourn adaptation. It sees a group of people rehearse a play while a close friend, George Riley, suffers from a fatal illness in the background. When the director passed away barely a month later, the film was suddenly seen in a very different

light, its intentions perhaps more vivid than they were when its creator still walked among us. The film openly inspects the links between life and art. Artifice is emphasised at every turn through brash performances, the stripped back, vibrantly-coloured sets, the use of "off-stage" space, and even knowingly bad special effects in the form of a toy badger that's digging holes in the lawn. In bringing together members of his regular repertory company - Hippolyte Girardot, André Dussollier and his widow, Sabine Azéma - it becomes clear that George is a stand-in for the director himself, a character whose unseen hand appears to be guiding the lives - artistic and emotional - of all around him. DAVID JENKINS

— No.41 —

LENI RIEFENSTAHL

IMPRESSIONS OF THE DEEP (2002)

To say the least, the final movie by one-time Nazi totem and cineethnographer Leni Riefenstahl is extremely unexpected. In 2002 and at the age of 100, Riefenstahl addresses the camera as a preface to her 45-minute documentary, Impressions of the Deep, explaining that the film we're about to see has no narration and that the images are vivid enough to speak for themselves. The upshot of a later-life fascination with Scuba diving and undersea exploration, this Cousteau-like montage of exotic sea life swimming in and out of pulsing coral shelves is simple, neat and pleasurable. It confirms Riefenstahl's promise as a maker of arresting images. Naturally, this is a more superficial work than, say, Triumph of the Will, and it's not helped by Giorgio Moroder's dire Muzak score in which he uses synthesiser effects as commentary on the fish captured on camera (example: when a fish whose skin resembles a decorative Japanese garment, Moroder breaks out the koto sound effects). Riefenstahl herself features in the final minutes, and the moving climactic shot observes as she swims up to the surface, directly towards a white light beaming down from above. She died the following year. DAVID JENKINS

- No.42 -

ERIC ROHMER

THE ROMANCE OF ASTRÉE AND CÉLADON (2007)

The Romance of Astrée and Céladon is more of an epilogue to Eric Rohmer's career than a swan song. If we take Rohmer's oeuvre as an extended conversation about the romantic lives of young people in modern France, then An Autumn Tale - his final contemporary-set picture - is the film that closes the cycle, with the three historical films that followed serving as reflective afterwords. The Romance of Astrée and Céladon still focuses on young love, but its central concern is the way we frame stories around it; the creative mechanics behind the art of love. At its heart, the film shows how each era's storytelling customs ultimately obscure the essence of romance. Though Rohmer's films were meandering and discursive, they were often structured like age-old parables. This film slyly deconstructs this approach, with elaborate period clichés - fair maidens and Sapphic sirens - comically pronounced and exposing the artificiality of each generation's storytelling devices. And yet it's hard not to get swept up in the woozy mysticism of Rohmer's fable. The director evidently surmised that, in constructing narratives around love, we enhance its mysterious power. Perhaps this is the key to his entire body of work? CRAIG WILLIAMS



JOHN SCHLESINGER

THE NEXT BEST THING (2000)

John Schlesinger will perhaps be remembered as the guy who brought gay/camp iconography to mainstream Hollywood in his Oscar-hauling Midnight Cowboy from 1969. So it seems strange that he would checkout with this tin eared, family-friendly take on modern metrosexual coupling. Madonna stars as a yoga instructor who can't find Mr Right, even though she's told on numerous occasions how pretty she is. Luckily, her gay best friend, played by Rupert Everett, is on hand to dress up, quaff Martinis and accidentally impregnate her. What should've been a progressive film about sexuality and parenting - a decade before the beloved likes of Lisa Cholodenko's The Kids Are All Right – turns into a mawkish and confused trawl through relationship woes in which the characters all come across as self-serving, petty imbeciles. Since his lightly radical formative years, Schlesinger made a pronounced move to more conventional fare during the final 25 years of his career, so this film which Robert Ebert evocatively described as being as "tired as a junkyard horse" simply stayed the course. DAVID JENKINS

— No.44 —

TONY SCOTT

UNSTOPPABLE (2010)

Over his career's last decade, highbrow contrarian critics recast Tony Scott's style as avant-garde. They said his image editing shattered point-of-view into a million little pieces. $D\acute{e}j\grave{\alpha}~Vu$, with its themes of trauma and voyeurism, gave Scott a chance to make his style seem personal and purposeful rather than glibly aggressive. But the supersaturated mise-en-scène and violent montage of Unstoppable revels in chaos as much as the film's gleefully engineered smash-ups. A film with an enormous carbon footprint, Unstoppable chases a runaway train through Pennsylvania, with news and rescue and second-unit helicopters along for the ride; its brand of populism is delightfully butch, as each character's grace under pressure correlates with his body-fat percentage. How can I put this? Tony Scott films constantly defied the gravity of death and Unstoppable is the final chapter in that body of work. It's the ultimate "escapism" — a definition given deeper shadings by Scott's subsequent suicide. MARKASCH

— No.45 —

OUSMANE SEMBÈNE

MOOLAADÉ (2004)

Under Azure skies, African village life plays out: bartering with The Mercenaire, bringing water bowls to guests, female genital mutilation on girls so small and spindly that, topless, they could pass as boys. When four girls ask Collé for protection, she casts a spell of moolaadé that prevents the knife-wielding salindana from coming within slicing distance. Director Ousmane Sembène also used a spell to ward off sexist practice in his classic *Xala* from 1975, about a man unable to perform sexually. His oppressive characters hide behind tradition, which runs in stark contrast to the politically progressive filmmaker himself. From his 1966 debut feature *Black Girl* until this his ninth and final film, Sembène was a free thinker, and he dignified the plight of

those suppressed due to race, gender, disability or poverty. His values lurked beneath seemingly idyllic, colourful, detailed worlds that bustled with engrossing characters. $Mool\alpha\alpha d\acute{e}$ is a fine swan song showcasing everything that he did best. His radical and subtle writing is packaged within seemingly throwaway episodes which all carry critiques so sharp that they still have to power to draw blood. **SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN**

— No.46 —

DOUGLAS SIRK

IMITATION OF LIFE (1959)

"Who wants to see the ugliness of life?" Hollywood producer Ross Hunter once said when reflecting on his career. "I gave the public what they wanted - a chance to dream, to live vicariously, to see beautiful women, jewels, gorgeous clothes, melodrama." Hunter was a perfect foil for Douglas Sirk, who could deliver all of the elegance that his producer demanded but who also made films that subverted and critiqued such opulence, adding some grit to the glamour. Sirk's last film was Imitation of Life, which is arguably his most damning indictment of American values, depicting a selfish and prejudiced society in which people are obsessed with surfaces. While the film was conceived as a star vehicle for Lana Turner - seeking rehabilitation after the violent end to her relationship with Johnny Stompanato - the real drama exists in the relationship between two supporting characters, black maid Annie (Juanita Moore) and her light-skinned daughter Sarah Jane (Susan Kohner). Pursuing a life that is off-limits to her, Sarah Jane passes as white and rejects her own mother, making this one of the most poignant and incisive studies of race ever made by a major Hollywood studio. Sirk was only in his early 6Os when Imitation of Life was released but he had long decided that this would be his last film. Health concerns were a factor, but he also seemed aware that the era of the 'women's picture' was coming to an end, and indeed the rise of soap operas on television soon spelled the end for features like this. Sirk knew his time was up, and judging by his subsequent output, Ross Hunter probably should have called it a day with this film too. PHIL CONCANNON

— No.47 –

JOSEF VON STERNBERG

ANATAHAN (1953)

Josef von Sternberg is known as something of an attention seeker, especially with regard to Marlene Dietrich. Dietrich's star power is so great and Sternberg's scene-building is so visually complex that his innovations with sound are often overlooked. For that reason, Anatahan, based on a true story of a Japanese platoon stranded on the eponymous volcanic island with a single woman for seven years during and after World War II, is rarely mentioned among his most important works. Sternberg shoots Akemi Negishi without the infatuation and worship with which he shot Dietrich, and his paper and aluminium sets take on a parodic tone as the 'Queen Bee' continues to cause the men, intentionally or not, to gradually pick one another off. Artifice and sounds, however, are key motifs, lost in the storm of the intentional but denigrated cookie-cutter images. The narration that speaks for and about the characters, forces a distance that the close-ups of Dietrich's legs never allowed for. Several films and decades of doing one thing brilliantly bred expectations, but Sternberg deserves credit for inverting his style to recast his stance on male passion and a woman's power. FORREST CARDAMENIS



— No.48 —

SEIJUN SUZUKI

PRINCESS RACCOON (2005)

Seijun Suzuki's films are unintelligible on a plot and, indeed, a shot-by-shot level. Basic continuity is scrapped as figures pose against garish Pop backgrounds in sequences of modernist compositions seemingly cut to Ornette Coleman tracks. Against such anarchy, there can be no diffidence: all attitudes are obsessive, all desires elemental. *Princess Raccoon* is then the perfect Suzuki love story. Adapted from a Japanese folk tale, the object of affection is a shape-shifting animal spirit. The film is a musical, made up of all-hands-on-deck song-and-dance numbers and intimate pas de deux — when not digressing into zany lowbrow comedy, or martial arts, which unfold across soundstage kabuki sets, natural exteriors and green-screen scenic paintings. Most unmistakably, it's a passionate, exuberant work. Now 92, the director has made it clear that the film is his career's celebratory exclamation point. MARKASCH

— No.49 —

WILLIAM WELLMAN

LAFAYETTE ESCADRILLE (1958)

They called him 'Wild Bill' Wellman for good reason. Expelled from his Massachusetts high school, he joined the French Foreign Legion during World War One and at 21 had signed up for the Lafayette Flying Corps, racking up three recorded kills over the skies of Alsace Lorraine before being shot down himself. He lived to tell the tale, made it to Hollywood and directed the first-ever Oscar-winner, 1927's Wings, which still impresses for its hair-raising aerial combat sequences. After career highlights including the Jimmy Cagney gangster classic *The Public Enemy* and the original 1937 A Star is Born, he returned to WWI

territory for what would be his last picture, 1958's Lafayette Escadrille. There's a surge of genuine emotion early on when Wellman follows the fate of those youthful American idealists who died in droves for the French cause. But elsewhere the film's stymied by its low-rent cast and penny-pinching budget, with only a smidgin of flying action and much turgid romance involving decorative yet wooden co-stars Tab Hunter and Etchika Choreau. Not the greatest send-off then, yet the sincerity of Wellman offering tribute to the sacrifices of his own great generation clearly stands for something. **TREVOR JOHNSTON**

— No.50 —

EDWARD YANG

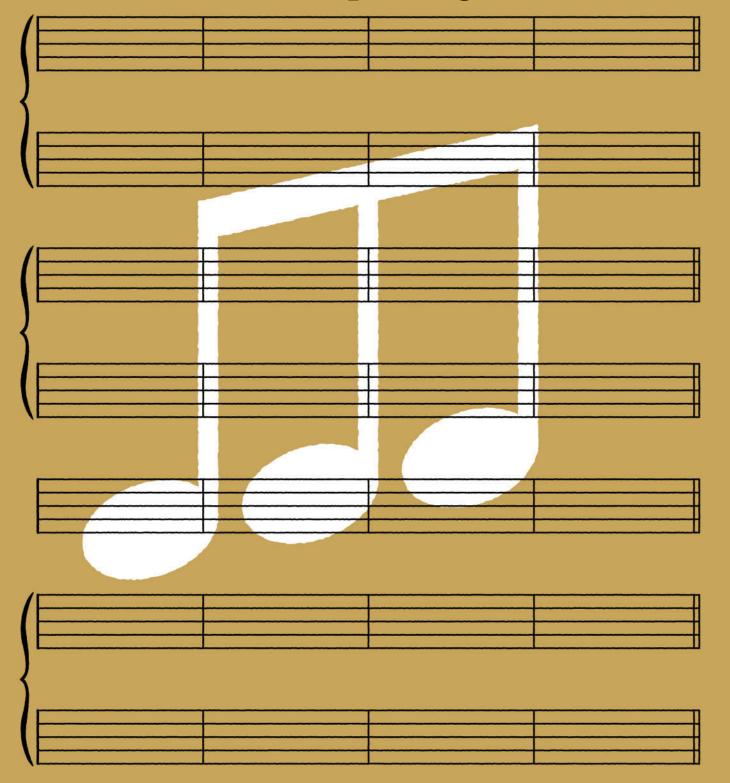
YI-YI (2000)

There is a rare type of film that, when you watch it, you can actually sense that it's some sort of parting gesture. During its three-hour running time, Edward Yang's humanistic masterpiece Yi Yi (or, as it was known in the UK, A One And A Two...) feels like the distillation of generations of accrued wisdom, a poetic collection of observations on the struggles and beauty of life in urban Taipei. With its multicharacter ensemble and an enquiring point-of-view that feels like a distinct presence watching over the actions, the film is anchored by the malaise-struck middle-class businessman, NJ, his teenage daughter Ting-Ting, and most movingly, by her kid brother Yang-Yang, as they all navigate tricky daily terrain at different stages of life. Yang generously presents each character's perspective on its own terms over the course of a single year, beginning with a wedding and ending with a funeral. Yang did not know this would be his final film – it was seven years later that he lost a battle with cancer at the age of 59. This huge loss for cinema is made a little easier to bear thanks to the existence of this film, which has the power to teach, console, inspire, and even engage with life anew with its compassionate yet measured take on the human experience. ADAM COOK

LIFE IS TOO SHORT FOR BAD FILMS MUBI.COM

Arranged by Fred Ballinger

A Simple Song



ACT III

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Anomalisa

Directed by

CHARLIE KAUFMAN, DUKE JOHNSON Starring

DAVID THEWLIS
JENNIFER JASON LEIGH
TOM NOONAN
Released
11 MARCH



ANTICIPATION.

Obviously



ENJOYMENT.

Intricately, brilliantly, tragically solipsistic.



IN RETROSPECT.

Commitment to mapping a specific type of suffering is never less than absolute.

urt Vonnegut's 1963 novel 'Cat's Cradle' is about the fictional religion of Bokonism. In it, he invented a new vocabulary for how we evaluate others. The most profound thing you can say about a person is that they belong to your "karass". This, Vonnegut defines as "a network or group of people who are somehow affiliated or linked spiritually." Charlie Kaufman wrote Being John Malkovich and Adaptation., and directed Synecdoche, New York, and I am a member of his karass. We are linked by name and an inward nature, and therefore I naturally accept qualities in his latest film, Anomalisa, that might deter others. Since its premiere at the Telluride Film Festival, the film's

gender politics have been widely discussed. Yet there's a narrative that is driven by a self-consciously wretched man which both eclipses and consumes this element of the film. The fact that the lead character cannot recognise the depth of others – women and men – is the whole melancholic point of this film.

Michael Stone (David Thewlis) is the loneliest of all of Charlie Kaufman's lonely men. White, married and joyless, he has grey hair, middleaged spread and no clear reason for living. Wellmeaning conversationalists only grate on his frazzled nerves. Thewlis's raw Lancashire bark hints at the desperate suffering beneath his autopoliteness. Michael can't communicate with the people who pass through his life. Their inability to touch him and his inability to perceive them is telegraphed with a bold casting choice that constantly reinforces Michael's plight while powering a source of hilarity on a par with the 'Malkovich, Malkovich, Malkovich' scene in 1999's Being John Malkovich.

The world that Kaufman has built with the invaluable expertise of co-director and animation whiz, Duke Johnson, is a new subgenre: social realist stop-motion puppetry. The costly joke is that years of painstaking work has gone into creating sets that are entirely banal. Rather than labouring in the name of fantastical, stylised spectacle like many a proud aesthete, their efforts focus on recreating the architecture of everyday life - like a mini version of the play in Synecdoche, New York. Charlie Kaufman values the intensity that comes from mirroring reality. Watching Anomalisa is like watching a mind trying to escape its own tedious corridors, searching for the sweet release of a meaningful voice next door.

Michael is a guru. His book, 'How Can I Help You Help Them?', has established him as a god of the customer service scene. He has flown to Cincinnati to address disciples. The arc is simple. He meets a woman called Lisa (Jennifer Jason Leigh) and thinks that she has changed his life. She is a paragon of insecurity

overwhelmed by each drop of tenderness. If his soul is trapped inside, hers spills out in torrents. Their liaison is awkward, touching and driven by his persuasive neediness. Lisa submits at every stage in a way that is not going to win *Anomalisa* any progressive representation awards, but still has the ring of truth. Some who have gone without intimacy for a long time are just glad to replenish their stocks.

Duke Johnson is unlucky and lucky to co-direct on his debut feature. He's unlucky because the story is so patently Kaufman-esque (he originally wrote it as a play under the pen name Francis Frejoli) that the credit defaults to the more established artist. But he is lucky because Anomalisa is a hell of a calling card, showing he can deliver a nuanced animation and fulfil an idiosyncratic vision. The most striking aspect of the puppets are their more-humanthan-human eyes made from a combination of 3D printed irises, self-repairing silicon and clear resin. "Sadness was a word we used a lot when talking to everybody," Johnson has said. This is apparent everywhere and particularly in the leaden movements of Michael who drags himself onward like a man in danger of crumpling.

Most of the drama takes place in the soothing but anonymous Frejoli hotel. A steady stream of absurd, perceptive jokes evince Kaufman's capacity to entertain even while distilling the essence of alienation and the chimeric releases that taunt its sufferers. He is a sad clown. His characters are puppets for solipsistic malaise. Yet he is passionate about humour and the joke count is high. From unsexy chat-up lines ("Would you like to get a drink, chat about phone system innovation?") to running gags best left unspoiled to the relish with which the minutiae of hotel life is milked for frustration, Anomalisa is as coloured by external detail as it is fuelled by internal torment. The complexity of the ideas at play is intoxicating both emotionally and intellectually. Kaufman is ahead of his character in delivering the antidote to self-absorption: meaningful communication. SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN







Charlie Kaufman & Duke Johnson

One of America's most lauded screenwriters has teamed up with a maestro of stop-motion animation. *LWLies* meets the melancholic pair behind the heartbreaking *Anomalisa*.

harlie Kaufman writes elaborate worlds to express his tormented inner life. He sharpens despair into comedy and finds hope in metaphysical inventions. He's given us a portal into John Malkovich's body (Being John Malkovich), a screenwriter who becomes obsessed with his subject (Adaptation.) and a memory-erasing service for the broken-hearted (Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind). Most ambitious in scope was his first bash at feature directing: 2008's Synecdoche, New York explored the futility of the art-cannibalising-life cycle via a never-ending play conceived by Caden Cotard (Philip Seymour Hoffman). Anomalisa is as intricately developed, but its story – about a lovelorn and sexually frustrated customer service stooge – takes place within a micro, hand-built universe. Kaufman has teamed up with animation prodigy, Duke Johnson, to direct a kickstarter-funded film about lonely stop-motion puppets.

<u>ALL BUILT?</u> Charlie Kaufman: Everything is built. Michael is the largest puppet and he's exactly a foot tall. So the sets are built in proportion to him. You have little hotel room, little staircases, little hallways.

Duke Johnson: Part of the reason we were able to do this for the budget that we did is because the general scope of the world is relatively small. Most of it takes place in a hotel room. We did have some expansive sets: the airport terminal, things like that.

CK: The office.

DJ: It was like 30 feet.

CK: Because we needed him to be really small.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW - MICHAEL AND THE HOTEL ROOM AND EVERYTHING THAT YOU BUILT? DJ: Burbank, California.

CK: We had a marketing meeting with Paramount when they took the film. Duke brought in Michael and Lisa puppets – there's a bunch of them – just because they hadn't seen them yet. They just stood there on the table and it was really sad, because you suddenly realise that they're not alive. After looking at them for so long moving in the movie, they're just these puppets. Beautiful puppets, but they're puppets.

AT SOME POINT, WE'RE ALL GOING TO BE LIKE LITTLE LIFELESS PUPPETS ANYWAY. CK: That's true. That's sad. That's kind of brought me down that you said that.

THE EYES JUMP OUT FROM ALL OF THE PUPPETS AS IF SILENTLY SCREAMING FOR HELP. HOW DO YOU BUILD AN EYE THAT LOOKS SO SENSITIVE AND REAL? CK: Explain how big they are.

DJ: Michael is 12 inches tall. His head is about an inch so you can imagine how big his eye is within there. We looked at glass eyes because there are some very intricate glass doll eyes but nothing that small. We ended up 3D printing the core of the eye and the iris – every iris – is individually hand-painted by this guy with a monocle. Then it's cast in this mould. The white of the eye is a type of silicon that's self-repairing. Then there's a layer of resin that goes over the top. You get depth like a real eye from the clear resin into the iris. The way that the animator moves it is they have to stick a pin in the white of each eye and move it the thickness of a hair, and then they have to do the same thing with the other eye, because they're not connected. They have to match them one frame at a time otherwise they look cross-eyed.



"I remember how old I was when I discovered theatre. I was in third grade. That really changed everything in the trajectory of my life."

HOW DO YOU CREATE THE EFFECT OF THEM DRINKING THEIR LITTLE COCKTAILS? DJ: It's a series of martini glasses, maybe 10 of them. There's hard resin liquid in each one. They just swap it out for a different one and it gets less and less and less.

DID YOU HAVE A FAVOURITE PART OF MAKING THIS FILM? CK: You answer it first because I have to think. Unless you can't and then we'll both be quiet for a minute.

DJ: One of the greatest parts of the experience was working with one of my heroes. I learnt a lot from working with Charlie about the creative process in general. That was invaluable to me.

ARE THERE ANY SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF WHAT YOU LEARNT? DJ: How to be brave when you're being creative. Focusing on how to find truth in the moment and how to focus on the character's experience. You have to be able to communicate your ideas to people. Charlie's very good at that. He's very articulate. Okay, more coming to me. Being able to look at something and find what's interesting about it. God, I'm not being very articulate but it seems resonant to me.

THIS IS THE CORE OF THE CREATIVE DRIVE: YOU HAVE SOMETHING THAT YOU REALLY WANT TO SAY BUT IT'S SO HARD TO FIND THE WAY THAT DOESN'T SOUND STUPID. DJ: So many times you feel like something doesn't feel right. Then Charlie would be like, 'Well, maybe this' or 'What about this?' and I'd be like, 'Ahh, that's fucking brilliant. That's it.'

IS IT IDEAS THAT CHARLIE WOULD HAVE OR IS IT JUST EXPRESSING THE IDEAS RIGHT? DJ: Being able to articulate. A lot of the time you can feel something intuitively but being able to articulate what that is or even start that conversation is a skill. Also, being open to other people's ideas and being able to draw out of people what their contributions are. As a filmmaker there's a sense of being an auteur and 'everything must be mine' but that's really not the best way. Filmmaking is an extremely collaborative process. People come to you and they have their own ideas. Being able to stay true to a vision but also take the best of what other people can contribute is a skill.

DID YOU THINK ABOUT WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF THE PROCESS WAS? CK: I can't really. I think my experience of this movie that I liked a lot was the sense of perseverance that went into it. It was a really taxing and stressful process because we didn't ever know if we were going to finish it. Along the way there were just these moments of morsels – a puppet design or a set design or a particular shot or a fragment of a shot that came in that was like, 'Oh my god'. That keeps you going. And that we did this on our own without any safety net and that it got done and it got done in a way that we were both pleased with, like, in retrospect, that experience is my favourite part of it, looking back and going, 'Oh wow. We did this' and 'Good for us.'

IS IT LIKE A VERSION OF THAT DOROTHY PARKER QUOTE 'I HATE WRITING.

LOVE HAVING WRITTEN'? DO YOU HATE MOVIE-MAKING BUT LOVE
HAVING MADE MOVIES? CK: No. Like I was saying, there are moments
where it's like, 'Oh that's so cool, that's so cool.' 'Oh we did that.' 'Oh that
works,' but you still don't know what the whole thing's going to be. I feel
more like Dorothy Parker does in terms of writing. Writing is really hard
for me and I don't enjoy it a lot. I don't know if I love having written but
if I've got something done, it's a relief. 'I hate writing. Having written is a
relief', maybe is my quote.

WITH EACH OF THESE MORSEL MOMENTS, DID THEY ACCUMULATE IN SIGNIFICANCE UNTIL AT A CERTAIN POINT YOU THOUGHT, 'THIS IS GOING TO COME TOGETHER HOW I WANT IT'? CK: No, because the pieces are so small. They spend so much time on a few seconds of film. It's a lot like making a movie before you make it. You have to say, 'This is how much we're shooting here.' 'We're not doing five takes of it' because it might take a month to shoot one shot. I don't think I was sure until we started putting it together in post-production. Sometimes there's a shot that you really aren't happy with and you're focused on it. Then when you see it in context, whatever the flaw in it that you saw doesn't matter any more, but you don't know that at the time it's like, 'Oh my god is that going to be awful' and then it isn't.

DJ: Not to get too new-agey but there's almost a sense of destiny that a film has, or a life of its own that it takes, where there are flaws within it but that flaw somehow contributes to the overall experience of the film in a unique, specific meaningful way. There are things like that that are weird, that feel magic... The magic of cinema!

SO YOU JUST COME TO UTTERLY BELIEVE IN WHAT YOU'RE DOING? DJ: What's the alternative? The train has left and you've committed to years of your life in this extremely difficult process. You have your doubts and there are times when maybe you want to give up or something just seems too hard but there's no choice. You have to just keep going towards this objective. That was my experience.

IT SOUNDS LIKE IT WAS MORE STRESSFUL FOR YOU, CHARLIE. HOW DO YOU MANAGE STRESS? CK: Depression. I don't know if that's managing it.

HOW DO YOU MANAGE DEPRESSION? CK: I have a dogged attitude, which isn't great but it's all I got so I just try to keep going.

DJ: Do you think that making art... I have a question now.

GO FOR IT. DJ: Do you think that making art, creating, expressing is a way of treating depression?

CK: Maybe. Probably better than the alternative. I don't know if it's a therapy thing for me but I haven't tried *not* doing it so I don't know the answer. But it's what I do because, in addition to everything else, it's how I make my living so I can't really stop and I guess that's good.

I PRODUCED A PANEL CALLED, 'CAN CREATIVITY HELP TAME MENTAL ILLNESS?' CK: What was the conclusion?

THE CONCLUDING THOUGHT WAS THAT EXPRESSING A THING CAN HELP YOU MANAGE IT, THE WAY IDENTIFYING A THING CAN HELP YOU MANAGE IT, BUT IT DOESN'T TAKE CARE OF IT FOREVER. CK: I do think that there's a value or a therapeutic value in putting something in the world that is truly you and having other people feel that it's true to them. That makes me feel less lonely. That's not a strategy or anything but it's a result that's good for me.

HAS IT ALWAYS BEEN THE WAY YOU MANAGED OR WAS THERE A TIME WHEN YOU MANAGED IN A DIFFERENT WAY? CK: Managed depression?

YEAH. CK: I've always been in the theatre, or written, or made films since I was a kid.

DO YOU REMEMBER HOW OLD YOU WERE WHEN YOU FIRST WROTE SOMETHING THAT MEANT SOMETHING TO YOU? CK: No, I remember how old I was when I discovered theatre. I was in third grade. That really changed everything in the trajectory of my life. It became my passion and

my focus. It was weird because it was a school play and I had been forced to be in other school plays and I hated it. I was really shy and I was really terrified. I remember I was in a play in second grade where I had like two lines and I had to tie somebody up. I don't remember what the play was about but I remember I figured out that if I stood behind the person I was tying up when I said my line, no one would ever have to see me. That was my plan and that's what I did. But for some reason in third grade I did a play and I played a character that was really unlike me. I played a rooster in a hen house who was very blustery and cocky. I got laughs and it was like something changed. You know, the whole world changed and that's all I wanted to do.

WAS IT THE FACT OF DOING SOMETHING SO OUT OF CHARACTER OR WAS IT GETTING A RESPONSE? CK: It was getting a response doing something out of character. It was getting to be somebody that I wasn't and getting laughs. God knows what it really was because I was in third grade – were people really laughing or was it parents being nice? I don't know. But to me, at the time, it was like, 'Holy cow. This is life-changing' and it became my focus for years. It was all I wanted to do.

IS IT NOW THE SAME, SO WITH ANOMALISA, IS THE REWARD HEARING PEOPLE SAY THAT THEY UNDERSTAND IT AND THEREFORE UNDERSTAND SOME PART OF YOU? CK: It's not as clear to me any more. It's not as immediate and direct as performing on stage. It's removed but I certainly do get some sort of something out of people responding. It feels more serious now and not necessarily in a good way. When we did this as a play, it was like no money and we just put on a play, and it was for two nights and no one got paid and it felt like high-school to me in the best way. I loved it. This is harder and longer. It's not the same. I can't get it back.

WHAT WILL BE YOUR NEW THING AFTER THIS? CK: What am I going to do professionally, is that what you mean?

I GUESS THAT'S WHAT I MEAN. ARE YOU GOING TO EXPLORE THESE THEMES THAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT, OF THINGS GETTING WORSE? CK: Things getting what?

WORSE. OR FEELING HEAVIER. IT SOUNDED LIKE YOU'RE SAYING THAT THINGS ARE GETTING HEAVIER. CK: Yeah. I don't know. You're making me rethink everything.

I'M SORRY. CK: No, it's cool. It's good.

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO HEAR YOUR CO-DIRECTOR TALKING LIKE THIS? DJ: Status quo.

CK: I feel like we haven't had this particular discussion yet, have we? Have I told you about the rooster?

DJ: Not specifically about the rooster but about you performing in plays as a kid and loving that. This is what the experience has been like – conversations about everything. We do some work and then it digresses into long conversations about art, history or opinions on things. Then it gets back on track and you do some work and that's all part of the process.

ARE YOU TWO PLANNING TO WORK TOGETHER AGAIN? DJ: We've talked about it.

CK: We'd like to do another animated movie at some point. We both have other things we want to do individually as well. We'll see. This was an interesting experience for me. It whet my appetite to try other things with it – try to explore it more as a form



Joy

Directed by
DAVID O RUSSELL
Starring
JENNIFER LAWRENCE
ROBERT DE NIRO
BRADLEY COOPER
Released
1 JANUARY



ANTICIPATION.

Russell's current streak has yielded varying results, but represents an exciting evolution.



ENJOYMENT.

You never know quite where you're going, but it's always fun getting there.



IN RETROSPECT.

If it's more about the journey than the destination, then Joy is a smashing success.

ew filmmaking careers display a creative transformation as drastic as that of David O Russell's. There was a smugness to his early work coupled with his infamous on-set outbursts that led to him being rejected by both his industry and his audience. Whatever soul-searching took place between 2004's I Heart Huckabees and 2010's The Fighter resulted in a dramatic shift in Russell's approach to cinema and, seemingly, to life itself. If there's a single quality that underlines the director's post-2010 output, it's a sense of compassion. It guides every decision. The Fighter, Silver Linings Playbook, American Hustle and now Joy adopt a humanist outlook in which damaged, inconvenient characters and families are accepted on their own terms, lovingly and delicately, as the unlikely authors of their modest fates.

The other development in Russell's career is the stable of actors he now draws from. Joy is the third successive collaboration in a row with Jennifer Lawrence, who was just 21 when she took on her Oscar-winning role in Silver Linings. In spite of her age, Lawrence has the uncanny ability to convey lived experience with her depictions of spiky sullenness and wide-eyed charisma. This special quality makes Joy her most ideal vessel yet. Russell wrote the film with her in mind, re-working an original script by Annie Mumolo. The title character - based on Joy Mangano, the inventor of the Miracle Mop - is a divorced singleton and matriarch of an eccentric household in which her ex-husband (Edgar Ramirez) and father (Robert De Niro) live together in the basement, her mother (Virginia Madsen) refuses to budge from her bedroom where she perpetually watches soap operas, and her loving grandmother (Diane Ladd, the film's narrator) is always around the corner with a watchful eye.

Pivoting around various flashbacks and fantasy sequences, we see Joy as a gifted young girl, creating things, dreaming of a bright future. This is juxtaposed with a grim reality where she's shown as being the epitome of untapped potential: a young woman who married the wrong guy early and was then burdened by her duties as a daughter and mother. "Time movies forward, time moves backward, time stands still," our narrator says as a scene between Joy and her best friend segues into a flashback: we see the first night she met her husband, the wedding, the failed relationship, the divorce, and back again – all moments existing fully, but tangled up in the memory.

When Joy stumbles on a brilliant idea for a mop with a detachable head that wrings itself, she asks her family for a leap of faith, and her father's new partner (Isabella Rossellini) for a generous investment. The venture leads Joy on a rags to riches tale as she tries to stake her claim in the world of commerce. From there the film moves unexpectedly and spontaneously towards her success, constantly reframing notions of life, loyalty and love. Russell and cinematographer Linus Sandgren have found a perfect harmony in their sensibilities, capturing Joy's rocky path with warmth and emotional vibrancy. Joy is a film about life's defiance of expectations. It defies them right back. ADAM COOK

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GLASGOW FESTIVAL











The Assassin

Directed by
HOU HSIAO-HSIEN
Starring
SHU QI
CHANG CHEN
TSUMABUKI SATOSHI
Released
22 JANUARY



ANTICIPATION.

Adored by many when it screened in Cannes, but what do those guys know?



ENJOYMENT.

A breathtaking work of art revolving around a haunting female lead.



IN RETROSPECT.

The texture is the story.

here is no risk of overstating the alternating manic and woozy pleasure of *The Assassin*. Like the lavish textiles that help divide the rooms of its Tang Dynasty courts, Hou Hsiao-Hsien's wuxia layers texture upon texture, masterfully obscuring detail to create a one of a kind cinematic experience. Turning Western and Eastern conventions of narrative structure and shot composition on their heads, it conjures feelings that won't diminish with repeated viewings. There's still plenty of clanging swords, doubles, double-crosses, supernatural conspiracies, and feet pattering across wooden roofs at night in the midst of

Hou's majestic formal play. (Plus: someone almost gets buried alive.)

There are two ways to enter *The Assassin*'s world: you could look up the 9th century short story upon which the film is based, or you could simply surrender to what's playing out on the screen. To keep your options open, I won't offer any straightforward plot summary (elsewhere, others have recited the plot, there's even a handy flowchart). More than simply "spoiling" any plot twists, even a rough understanding of the story will shape how the film washes over you.

Hou takes his elliptical tendencies to the extreme visually and narratively, with brief, second-hand accounts sharing the most straightforward deaths or power plays (both familial and regal in nature). At other moments, story points - which feel more like clues - are presented in chronological order but without context, making them seem incongruous. Except, of course, that they're not: this is an ultra-lean narrative with many strands, and any irrelevant moment, silent or otherwise, has been cut away. Even the discovery of a period faked with chicken blood turns out to be significant. Nothing exists only to "look pretty", yet this is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful films you'll see all year.

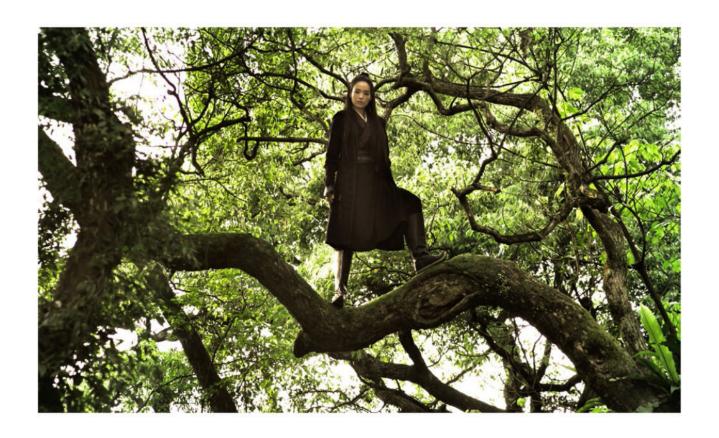
The level of precision is even more mindboggling considering that the director shot nearly 500,000 feet of 35mm film for this 90-minute work. Still, the tautness of The Assassin doesn't come off as the achievement of clever editing alone; there are dozens of moments of languorous, low-angled shots, such as one following the movements of torchcarrying palace servants that slowly drifts downward towards some well water and lands on an ominous effigy. Such moments are the most advanced choreography you'll see in this wuxia - per Hou's request, the actors didn't rehearse the fights beforehand, so these brief, rapidly edited outbursts of energy preserve a feeling of spontaneity. Harking back to his 30 shots-only 1998 film, Flowers of Shanghai,

Hou originally planned to shoot *The Assassin* in three-minute takes on a spring-wound Bolex, but scrapped the idea because his regular cinematographer, Mark Lee Ping Bin, "is not a young man anymore" and found composing shots through the camera's viewfinder difficult.

The tension in these fights is derived not from elaborate wirework, but from the poise of the combatants involved in them. When not brandishing her short, wavy dagger, Shu Qi (who plays the titular assassin Nie Yinniang) confidently approaches her opponents without meeting their gaze, either looking past them, as if they don't exist, or looking down at them out of distain, or to anticipate which way their feet will move. When pitted against another female assassin clad in a mauve coat and golden mask in a forest of birch trees, Nie's movements alternately harmonise and contrast with the peaceful wilderness around them. She stumbles one moment after dodging an unexpected thrust, then she walks away unperturbed and victorious. The low-key scuffle is broken up by a lengthy shot of the trees against the midday sky - from the perspective of neither character - which suggests a literal passage of time, but also something resembling a thirdperson narration of either character's feelings in that particular moment.

Given little dialogue, Shu perfectly captures Nie's moral and emotional ambiguity, taking her far from the "unrepentant badass" mould of most strong female characters. Without even turning the corners of her mouth, she manages to express intense regret, loss, and fury, sometimes all at once. Her mannerisms are no different from her fellow ladies of the court, yet she exudes an entirely different energy. Shu's performance is the haunting centre of the film – for Nie often seems like a ghost reluctantly returned from the dead, silently drifting through rooms. She dances against the abyss in what is Hou's most enigmatic film yet.

VIOLET LUCCA







Hou Hsiao-Hsien

LWLies meets the Taiwanese master who makes gorgeous movies and home-made Samurai swords.

he Assassin, the latest work from Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-Hsien, was a long time in the works, but the wait was worth it. Mournful, exacting and mysteriously moving, it sylistically slips right into his stunning body of work. Starting out in romantic melodramas in the early '80s, by the end of that decade he was producing some of the most innovative and acclaimed movies of the decade, including 1985's A Time to Live, a Time to Die and 1989's A City of Sadness. From there on in, Hou was in the business of making great movies, covering a swathe of eras, styles, countries and genres. This one is his personal take on the martial arts movie.

LWLIES: WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE HARDEST THING TO CAPTURE ON FILM? Hou: The hardest thing to capture is a true reflection of a character's feelings. That's why I never rehearse. I just set the scene and put the actors into an environment where they can act unconsciously, rather than practice and practice, or apply technique. *That* is not true. It's not real. Sometimes the actors can get there – to those feelings – in just one take, sometimes not, so I'll shoot another scene. I won't tell the actors if it's good or not, I'll just say 'next scene.' Then we'll try it again another day, to see if the feelings I want to capture are ready to come out then.

WHAT ARE THE QUALITIES YOU LOOK FOR IN AN ACTOR? With experience, I can tell just through a conversation whether someone will make a good actor or not. I first saw Shu Qi in a TV commercial and set up a meeting with her agent. She was really young – early 20s – and the first thing she said to me was, 'So, I know you're a famous director, but...' It was like she wanted to challenge me. I found that fascinating. She was really cool and I wanted to work with her. On *Millennium Mambo*, I hardly spoke to her, I just put her in these situations to see how she'd react, what her instincts were. I wanted her to show me her essence.

DIDN'T YOU CONSIDER A CAREER AS AN ACTOR INITIALLY? I'd be too self-conscious. I'd never make a good actor. You need to reflect character unconsciously, I'd be too self-aware.

YOU ALSO TALK ABOUT YOUR LOVE FOR SINGING IN OLIVIER ASSAYAS' DOCUMENTARY, HHH – UN PORTRAIT DE HOU HSIAO-HSIEN. THE FILM FINISHES WITH QUITE A KARAOKE PERFORMANCE FROM YOU. I don't think I'd make a great singer. I entered a singing competition at university, but nothing came out when I was on stage. I couldn't make a sound, I was too self-conscious.

YOU EXPLICITLY QUOTE OTHER FILMMAKERS IN A NUMBER OF YOUR FILMS. IN 1983'S THE BOYS FROM FENGKUEI, YOU FEATURE A SCENE FROM ROCCO AND HIS BROTHERS. WAS VISCONTI A BIG INFLUENCE ON YOU THEN? I saw Rocco when it was first released. Boys from Fengkuei came out in the heyday of Taiwanese commercial cinema. Myself and Edward Yang would spend a lot of time during that period discussing Italian Neorealism,

the New German Cinema, the French New Wave... We were really influenced by these New Cinema movements, which informed *Boys from Fengkuei*. That scene was shot in Taipei – the interiors, I mean – and we asked the cinema to play something. That was the film they had there that day.

FEOPLE HAVE BEEN TALKING ABOUT THE ASSASSIN AS YOUR FIRST FIGHT FILM, BUT THERE ARE NUMEROUS FIGHT SCENES THROUGHOUT YOUR FILMS, ESPECIALLY THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ONES. There were a lot of gangs where I grew up. At North Gate, there were the 24 Blue Eagles, and at West Gate there was City Temple, which I belonged to. It was a tradition in that rural area in southern Taiwan, and rivalries had been developing for generations. My uncle and his friends would be part of one group, while the younger generation would be part of another. There was another gang called 15 Wolves, and the biggest fight was between them and the 24 Blue Eagles, in the park at night. It was better to fight at night, under the cover of darkness. We'd fight with home-made samurai swords, the eldest at the front with the biggest swords. Us younger ones would be at the back with bricks, but we'd run to the front to throw them. You could see sparks coming off the swords when they'd fight. There were a lot of drug issues too, especially among the younger generation. A lot of my friends died that way.

HOW DID YOU GET AWAY FROM THAT ENVIRONMENT? I didn't graduate from high school, but I had to do my military service, which was compulsory. Those two years kept me away from the gangs, but when I came back, my father, who worked in Kaohsiung county government sent me to the local police station to be disciplined. I ran away to Taipei the next day, where I started working on an assembly line and tried to pass my university exam, which I just about passed. So I was able to escape by going to art college.

YOU'VE SPOKEN PREVIOUSLY OF YOUR INTEREST IN DOCUMENTING MASCULINITY IN CINEMA, AND YET SO MANY OF YOUR LATER FILMS – INCLUDING THE ASSASSIN – ARE FEMALE-CENTRIC. HOW DID THIS SHIFT IN PERSPECTIVE COME ABOUT? I'd usually write a character based on the specific qualities of the actor, which in later years I've found has come more easily with women, who have a stronger presence, like Shu Qi. I'd worked with Jack Gao for a long time, focussing on his masculine qualities. The young boy in Boys from Fengkuei too, he was ferocious, and just like his character. Even though he's from that background, he lacks the kind of fascinating charm I find in female characters.

SO IF WE EVER FIND OURSELVES IN A SITUATION WHERE WE NEED A HOME-MADE SAMURAI SWORD, WHAT'S YOUR ADVICE? When I needed one, I'd go to one of the eight alleys near the temple where I grew up. There was an iron shop in one of them, owned by my friend's father, so we'd look for a long piece of iron in the shape of a sword. Short ones were okay, long ones were better. Unfortunately in Taiwan, there's no tradition of making proper samurai swords, so we had to make them ourselves with what we found





Lost in Karastan

Directed by BEN HOPKINS Starring MATTHEW MACFADYEN, MYANNA BURING, **NOAH TAYLOR** Released 22 JANUARY

en Hopkins is a funny one. He's been quietly knocking together movies since the late '90s, dancing in his own eccentric circle and eluding anything that might be described as mainstream success. But his films are great - jocular and lyrical treatises on globalised economies and cultures. Even though this madcap latest, Lost in Karastan, feels like his largest scale project to date, there is little discernible attempt to make that connection to a big, broad audience. The possibly autobiograpical film allows us into the loopy world of European film festivals, as the fictional backwater of Karastan announces one of their own and programmes a retrospective of work by pompous British short film director Emil Forester (Matthew Macfadyen). When he arrives at the airport and has to hand over a cash bribe before he's even officially entered the country, the lay of the land has been set. For the remainder of the film he pings around like a gormless shill, eventually agreeing to make a film for the extremely corrupt but charismatic President Abashiliev (Richard van Weyden) which will star hack barbarian actor, Xan Butler (Noah Taylor).

Hopkins mocks the country's freeform bureaucracy while just about keeping the funny foreigner jokes in check. The film's total lack of formal finesse is perhaps fitting of its ramshackle subject, though it's occasionally a little too loose for its own good. That you have to question whether Hopkins intends this shoddiness to be ironic is not good. It recalls Woody Allen's Stardust Memories in the way it mocks the paradoxical pretensions of a film director, who is on one hand archly dismissive of philistines, but on the other would be happy to impart his wisdom if the price is right. Hopkins also has a pop at gentile Brits out of their cultural depth, unwilling to immerse themselves in new communities and always thinking about whether there's someone back home available to feed the dog. DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION.

Always got time for a new Ben Hopkins film.

ENJOYMENT.

Just about hangs together on wacky charm.

IN RETROSPECT.

See you in a few years Mr Hopkins!

Bolshoi Babylon

Directed by NICK READ, MARK FRANCHETTI Starring SERGEI FILIN, MARIA ALEXANDROVA, MARIA ALLASH Released 8 JANUARY

he Bolshoi Ballet is a byword for consummate artistry and a world leader in classical dance. Behind the red velvet curtain is enough corruption, fierce rivalries and even violence to rival any palace intrigue. A mere 500 metres from the Kremlin, we find the Bolshoi on the verge of meltdown in Nick Read and Mark Franchetti's documentary. A hint that all wasn't well in paradise surfaced when a masked man threw acid in artistic director Sergei Filin's face. It emerged that the assailant was paid by a principle male dancer, angry at Filin for overlooking his girlfriend's abilities, the incident was chalked up as a case of revenge. Yet the investigation opened a window on a murky and unstable world run by people who skirt that very thin line between passionate artists and Bond villain-style megalomaniacs.

In Bolshoi Babylon, we don't really learn any more than that. It appears that becoming involved in the ballet at this level requires political discretion that some find uncomfortable. We meet dancers thrilled to endure intense physical and psychological pain to realise their childhood dreams. We see them smiling nervously and hesitant to acknowledge the rot, lest they incur the ire of their shady masters. Between interviews there are sundry shots of dancers practicing tirelessly and some archive footage of past greats on stage. It's interesting how the directors allow subjects to think that they are at the centre of the film, while in the edit, the testimonies are played against one another as a way to emphasise the internal conflict. Maybe it's unfair to suggest the results would be similar were you to turn your cameras on any commercial enterprise of this size, yet the conclusion that crooked politics, wayward egos and a climate of fear are core to the Bolshoi's day-to-day activities hardly makes for breaking news. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION. *Is cinema going to bring down one* of the world's most beloved entertainment institutions?

ENJOYMENT.

Not by a long shot.

IN RETROSPECT. Maybe more interesting as a behindthe-scenes exposé than it is a piece of hard journalism.



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HOU HSIAO-HSIEN

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ACADEMY AWARDS 2016

IN CINEMAS JANUARY 22

THE SEASON WILLIAMS SEED TO PEAR HOST THE HYDING IN THIS IN THE THE THAT WILLIAMS SEE AND PERFORM THE THAT WILLIAMS FOR THE THAT WIL



Janis: Little Girl Blue

Directed by
AMY BERG
Starring
JANIS JOPLIN
CAT POWER
SAM ANDREW
Released
5 FEBRUARY



ANTICIPATION.

Amy Berg on Janis Joplin with Alex Gibney producing. Just yes.



ENJOYMENT.

Archival riches on a real soul poet.



IN RETROSPECT.

Break another little piece of my heart now, darling.

s a young girl, I heard my mother screaming along to a tape recording of Janis Joplin's 'Piece of My Heart'. It was shocking confirmation that a parent hadn't consigned emotions to a neat filing cabinet labeled 'The Past'. I may as well have heard her having sex for all the yearning those shrill notes revealed. From a child's perspective it was pure embarrassment.

The pain of desire and the release of emoting was central to the singer Janis Joplin until she died from a heroin overdose at 27. Amy Berg's documentary portrait charts and contextualises her tumultuous time on earth while keeping the art of raw expression as a key note. Joplin's own words are a trail of breadcrumbs in the form of letters home to middle-class Texan parents. Like a good girl, she kept them in the loop as she went from singing the blues on the fringes to the heart of '60s rock 'n' roll. Chan Marshall (aka Cat Power) narrates extracts in her childlike southern tone. The words are earnest and evoke a more innocent time when hippy terms like 'man' and 'groovy' could be spoken without inverted commas.

A tone of tenderness and respect is maintained across interviews with family, friends, band members and lovers. All knew of her insatiable need to be loved. It was a force that underpinned and loaded her career ambitions. A soft woman emerges. Her singing voice may have sounded like a soul cut by sandpaper, but her speaking voice was polite and gentle. Rolling Stone's David Dalton described Janis as having: "Almost a Huck Finn innocence. The absolute woman-child ideal of the Haight."

The scene's values help us understand the woman who blossomed out of it. We are given a lively glimpse of a time when Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco was the centre of the once feted, now dated ideals of mind-expanding drug-taking and free love. Drugs and sex were not lasting enough for Joplin, and the film's steady momentum reflects this – freewheeling energy is corralled by concrete events.

We are introduced to Janis growing up as a social outsider in Port Arthur, Texas. Her pain at being bullied and desire for acceptance drove her ever onward: to Austin to sing the blues, home again to recover from meth addiction, to California to join Big Brother and the Holding Company, then stardom at the Monterey festival and relationships with musicians. Her heroin addiction is presented with a non-judgmental sadness. Everyone knew she used. Everyone has a soulful theory as to why. We hear about her shooting up while chatting with friends at the Chelsea Hotel. (Leonard Cohen wrote a song for her called 'Chelsea Hotel')

Music sourced from live performances, from on the road and in recording sessions punctuates every biographical episode. Janis' voice lasers through bullshit leaving only something quivering and naked and real. The primal heart powering her singing erases time and puts me back in my childhood home listening to my mother screaming the blues. Both women are now dead but the emotion behind the music will never die. Amy Berg is a bold director to recognise and channel intangible feelings of longing in this apt, tragic and inspiring documentary.



Room

Directed by
LENNY ABRAHAMSON
Starring
BRIE LARSON
JACOB TREMBLAY
SEAN BRIDGERS
Released
15 JANUARY



ANTICIPATION.

Abrahamson's previous, Frank, was more a daffy diversion than modern great.



ENJOYMENT.

This is the Larson and Tremblay show. Both are stunning.



IN RETROSPECT.

A film about the infinite complexity of a deceptively simple situation.

f a movie depicts a woman and her toddler son held captive in a small, cramped room by a repugnant male sex pervert, it's only natural to expect some kind of retribution take place. In so often fulfilling that desire, cinema promotes a creed of cyclical violence. What's good for the goose is good for the gander. But it's okay, because when the bad dude gets his inevitable comeuppance, objective justice has been served and we can skip from the cinema, punching the air and perhaps even believing that real life offers such natural fixes. Lenny Abrahamson's *Room* follows this convention, but in a sensitive and clever way, one which doesn't allow the viewer to vicariously enjoy the pain being inflicted on a "bad" person by way of revenge.

The film is about how some people are too busy dealing with their own shit to be able to psychologically jolt themselves into a mindset which has them baying for blood. That's not to say that the source of evil in the film isn't punished, it's just that Abrahamson doesn't give us the squalid satisfaction of witnessing it. It's also a film which explores the complex dividing lines between grief and happiness. When awful tribulations come to their ecstatic end, we don't just reset to zero and readjust to life as it was before the war.

Brie Larson's Ma is remarkably cheery and strong for a woman who has been snatched away from her cosy suburban life to exist as a sex slave in a shed. Her son Jack (Jacob Tremblay) is her only companion in this horrific ordeal. Old Nick (Sean Bridgers) is the devil with the key code to the big metal door which cuts them off from the wider world, the wind, the trees, animals, buildings, everything. And while Ma and Jack have settled into a routine of enforced domesticity, they secretly hatch schemes to free themselves. Even though there are breathless thriller elements in their attempts to break out, it's only late in the game that *Room* reveals that it is not a thriller, but a moving feminist tract which explores questions of what it means to be a mother, what it means to give love, and what it means to receive it.

The most heartbreaking thing about *Room* is how Ma is forced to bring up her son in the belief that he will never know the world outside. He has no concept of society, technology, architecture, and out of desperation she has to corrupt his learning curve so to dampen his desire for escape. That she then has to carefully undo all of this necessary developmental meddling is possibly the source of her subsequent depression.

Perhaps the film's most impressive feat, however, is that it flips, back and forth, between the perspectives of Ma and Jack. Abrahamson is not interested in the gimmick of presenting Jack's subjective perception of the world, but he does show Ma's perspective of her son's limited, distorted grasp of this strange situation. Ma's eventual sense of grief isn't fuelled by the violent specifics of the ordeal, but the sense that her "fatherless" son has been irrevocably corrupted by what he has (and hasn't) seen, or that she has somehow let him down. It's an incredibly moving and detailed work. By shunning melodrama to focus on physical and emotional minutiae, it's a film about the imperceptible struggles of getting through each dark day, DAVID JENKINS



Brie Larson

LWLies ask the brilliant star of Room how to be a good mother in the movies.

LWLIES: IN ROOM THE ACTOR JACOB TREMBLAY PLAYS YOUR YOUNG SON AND THE FILM IS ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER. HOW DID YOU GET ALONG WITH HIS REAL PARENTS? Larsson: His parents are so lovely and warm. They understood how important it was that Jacob felt comfortable with me. They know him better than anybody. They knew what type of parameters to set that would not make it feel like an intimidating situation. It was going to be like, 'Oh hey, there's this girl you're going to meet, we're going to hang out with her a little bit and see what happens.'

DO YOU REMEMBER YOUR FIRST MEETING? It was really casual. It was at a pizza parlour with his parents and director Lenny [Abrahamson]. A few of the producers were there too. It was a big setting, so very much not just the two of us. It gave the opportunity for us to share a few words, but the intention was not focused on that. By the end of that evening, he invited me over to play Lego with him. And his mom was there, but she would wander in and out. She would say things like, 'Jacob, you were saying before that you were curious to find out what Brie's favourite animal is, so why don't you ask her?' And he'd ask me that. It allowed this sense that it was never this intimidating one-on-one. It was safe. It was on his terms with his stuff and in his space.

HOW CLOSE WERE YOU WHEN FILMING STARTED? As our three weeks of rehearsals came to an end, we were so close by that point. We had spent so much time together. We would do the routine you see at the beginning of the film every day in rehearsals. So we were hitting the point where he felt comfortable jumping on me, grabbing me, letting me hold him. That's a big deal. That's how it all came together at the beginning. On set, his parents were always there, but once we're shooting a scene, they wouldn't keep coming over and reminding him of things.

DO YOU THINK IT WAS STRANGE FOR THEM TO SEE THEIR SON IN THIS RELATIONSHIP WITH ANOTHER MOTHER? At first I was worried about it, because I'm not a mom. I'd always look to Christina – his mom – to ask, is this right? She became the best expert on that. She'd pick up on the simple trials and tribulations of being a mother. The key moments are where you're exhausted, but you have to keep acting like it's okay.

YOU'RE VERY CONVINCING AS A MOTHER. HOW DOES ONE LEARN TO BE A GOOD MOTHER? I would be curious to know what other women have to say about it, but from my own experience, something just clicks in when you start to care about someone, or something that isn't yourself. One aspect of that from my life is the work that I do: it has always felt like an act of service for me. It's something that's beyond me. The other aspect is that I'm an oldest grandkid, and I either lived with my cousins, or next door to them, while they were babies up until about 11 or 12. So I was always the family babysitter. I think it's just one of my superpowers that kids are just attracted to me. At Telluride, we went to this pizza parlour as they had air hockey and there were breaks between screenings. I was planning on

hanging out with the adults, eating pizza and having a Moscow Mule, but instead I somehow ended up getting roped into being the ringleader of eight small children. Within minutes, I've got a battle of the sexes hockey game going. We're screaming. We're falling on the ground. A woman came up to me and asked if I was local, if I was a babysitter, and could we hire you. I ran into some friends at the pizza parlour and started talking to them, and this little girl came up to me and started pulling on my shirt and I picked her up and they asked, 'who's this?!' and I was like, 'I have no idea.'

YOUR ROLE IN THE FILM SHORT TERM 12 IS ALSO QUITE MATERNAL, THOUGH IN A LESS LITERAL WAY. HAVE THERE BEEN ANY PREVIOUS PARTS WHICH HAVE FELT LIKE TRIAL RUNS FOR THIS ONE? Short Term 12 was the first time I worked with kids. And I absolutely loved it. It's why I knew I could do Room because I will take any chance I can to make my job not about me, and make it about something else. The thing I struggle with the most is, whatever I do, it's always my face up on the screen. I want to be more of an Andy Serkis where you're CGI'd into something else. My physical presence is there. Because I had met with these real foster kids for Short Term, I felt such a material, strong love, I really wanted to fight for them.

IS IT SAD WHEN A FILM ENDS AND YOU HAVE TO MOVE AWAY FROM THESE PEOPLE? For different reasons, I find one of the hard parts is not being able to fix it. Every day on set, you're working within the factors that are there, whatever's available to you emotionally, and no matter what, you think, 'Well yesterday might have been bad, but I have the opportunity today to fix it.' To hit the final day, it always reminds me where you're watching those cooking shows where you have to cook an entrée in 20 minutes, and it's all good during the 20 minutes, but as soon as the time's up and you have to take your hands away, suddenly you're like, 'Oooooh, I wish I could redo that whole thing.' The hard part is letting go of the process. Letting go of the opportunity to explore the process. Hope that you've given a good enough range of colours for the editor to paint with.

BY TALKING ABOUT THIS MOVIE, DO YOU FIND YOU'RE LEARNING MORE ABOUT IT? Yeah, that's the cool part. And that's why I'm picky about what it is I make. You want something that can exist beyond a single viewing and is not just about one thing. You don't want a film with a moral at the end. You want something bigger than that. You can take it, you can spend hours talking about it, and when you do, it constantly changes. It resonates personally in different ways with different people. And not to mention different countries – they pick up on different things. It's nice that it's a living, breathing conversation. They hard part about interviews like this is trying hard to make it seem like everything made sense. That these decisions were conscious. Because a lot of the time they aren't. It's just creativity and intuition going in one direction. But as you talk, you get to learn more about how your subconsious was working back then. You get to see the larger picture of the movie



Le Mépris (1963)

Directed by
JEAN-LUC GODARD
Starring
BRIGITTE BARDOT
JACK PALANCE
MICHEL PICCOLI
Released
1 JANUARY



ANTICIPATION.

Is this Jean-Luc Godard's greatest film?



ENJOYMENT.

You know what? It just might be.



IN RETROSPECT.

A knowing, tragic-comic aria for love and moviemaking.

s that smile mocking, or tender?" asks bemused screenwriter Paul Javal (Michel Piccoli) of his naked, newish wife Camille (Brigitte Bardot), as the two pace their half-decorated, newly acquired flat in Rome. They are conducting a premature autopsy of their marriage in Jean-Luc Godard's multi-lingual French-Italian co-production Le Mépris.

Godard's sixth movie – as good a candidate as any to be named the director's masterpiece – itself poses a plenitude of such rhetorical questions, cruelly connecting derisive darts and compassionate insights. The film is the director's reworking of novelist Alberto Moravia's "nice, vulgar" tale of Paul and Camille's tragicomic misfortunes during a Mediterranean location film shoot of Homer's 'The Odyssey'. The film-within-a-film has been classically re-imagined by director Fritz Lang (playing, very movingly, himself) and commercially bastardised by philistine producer Jeremiah Prokosch (Hollywood hardman/villain Jack Palance, hyperbolically, scarily, sociopathically entertaining).

An immense amount of off-screen activity is at work too: Bardot, in 1963 and at the height of her celebrity, had not been developing as an actress under her husband, the producer-director Roger Vadim. Despite reported difficulties (alongside Godard weaving variations of his own internecine relationship with wife Anna Karina into Bardot's role and on-screen marriage), she delivers perhaps her finest performance, embodying her instinctive, life-coerced character with a potent cocktail of sensual allure, fierce mystery and genuine pathos.

Likewise, Godard, smarting from the lambasting of his previous movie, Les Carabiniers, was determined, in his own interpretation of classical film grammar, to show he knew exactly where to place a movie camera. To this end, he encouraged genius cameraman Raoul Coutard to orchestrate with his 'Scope camera ("suitable only for filming snakes and coffins") an arresting series of sinuous, almost spirographic dances. These graceful glides and pans were a response to the imperious, opaque-eyed gods and meanders for the mere, foolish mortals. Known as the Godard favourite amongst the non-Godardians, Le Mépris certainly is one of the director's more easily consumable works. A fine contribution to the genre of movies on movingmaking - on the death of cinema, and the possibility of its renewal - it also offers accessible and meaningful musings on, amongst others, such matters as destiny and freewill, empathy and self-interest, sensuousness and aestheticism, principle and pragmatism, the natural and the industrial, the poetic and the prosaic and using comedy and tragedy to tell the stories of human lives.

In short, it is a full and immensely satisfying work, its tensions and teasing contradictions, moral, cinematic and intellectual, making it as exhilarating, alive and modern a film as any. Georges Delerue's sublime score is crucial in uniting all the film's irreconcilables. The repeated motifs and melodies themselves combine, as does the movie, the classical and the modern, deepenening the meanings and the mixed emotions of defiance and nostalgia that make *Le Mépris* so very affecting and – a word Godard would be proud of – so very beautiful. WALLY HAMMOND



Creed

Directed by
RYAN COOGLER
Starring
MICHAEL B JORDAN
SYLVESTER STALLONE
TESSA THOMPSON
Released
15 JANUARY



ANTICIPATION.

Coogler impressed with Fruitvale Station, but do we really need another Rocky film?



ENJOYMENT.

Tough, tender and exhilarating.



IN RETROSPECT.

Creed indeed.

magine your life being played out in not just one movie, but a whole series of films released over decades, capturing every setback, every love, every loss and every triumph. French director François Truffaut did just that for his character, Antoine Doinel, played by Jean-Pierre Leaud, in a cycle of films between 1959 and 1979. During those years, audiences saw this man grow up on the screen. American cinema has an equivalent. His name is Rocky Balboa. But rather than witness boy blossoming into man, we've seen a doe-eyed, marble-mouthed lunkhead slug his way into the popular consciousness via a string of gruelling personal and professional struggles. It's fair to say that Rocky (Sylvester Stallone) - last seen pacing the ring as a sexagenarian in Rocky Balboa (2006) - has endured considerably more than 400 blows on his journey. Time, then, for the old man to enjoy some respite?

Creed answers the question with an absorbing and electrifying series reboot conceived, directed and co-written by Ryan Coogler, whose 2013 debut Fruitvale Station – a docudrama about the final day in the life of a young black father slain by police – marked him out as a sensitive director with a warm, naturalistic style. Rather than totally marginalise Rocky, Coogler ushers him into a dignified supporting role as mentor to a new star, Adonis Johnson (Fruitvale's Michael B Jordan), the illegitimate son of his late rival Apollo Creed.

Adonis is a well-paid white-collar drone and part-time boxer who jacks in his sterile LA existence for the mean streets of Philadelphia. He aims to persuade Rocky, now a restaurant manager, to train him so that he can forge his own legend and escape the long shadow of the father he never met. Yes, the premise is a little far-fetched, but the brooding, charismatic Jordan sells it, and the actor's stunningly chiselled physique says more than dialogue ever could about his character's commitment to the cause. As the plot kicks in, Coogler doesn't try to reinvent the wheel: as in many sports films, the protagonist undergoes crises of faith on his journey toward spiritual nourishment. He also falls for the beautiful girl next door, a tough-yet-sensitive singer-songwriter played with wit and grace by Tessa Thompson.

Lest Creed sound overly tender and ruminative for a boxing flick, it also packs a serious punch, replete with crunching fight sequences captured by DoP Maryse Alberti in a probing, prowling style. The staggering high point is a duel between Adonis and a local Philly fighter which unfolds in one unblinking, visceral take. (If there are digital edits, they are imperceptible.) And while there's no flamboyant villain in the vein of Clubber Lang (Rocky III) or Ivan Drago (Rocky IV), real-life pugilist Tony Bellew is understatedly menacing as Adonis' Scouse rival "Pretty" Ricky Conlan. He's tough, but never distracts us from the fact that Adonis' greatest fight is against himself.

At 133 minutes, *Creed* is flabbier than necessary: a subplot concerning Rocky's fight with an illness, while touching in its own right, slackens the pace midway. However, Coogler pulls it around for a barnstorming final act and a moving, understated denouement. Jordan – and this film – are both good enough for us to hope that Adonis will be training up a new heir to the throne forty years from now. **ASHLEY CLARK**



The Revenant

Directed by

ALEJANDRO GONZÁLEZ IÑÁRRITU Starrina

LEONARDO DICAPRIO TOM HARDY DOMHNALL GLEESON Released





ANTICIPATION.

This is our kind of event movie.



ENJOYMENT.

Bold, beautiful and unrelentingly bleak.



IN RETROSPECT.

Iñárritu's opus sears itself into your subconscious with unflinching intent.

wo acts of bloody retribution bookend *The Revenant*: to the west, Pawnee Indians lay siege to a camp of American fur trappers, each true arrow carried by a chilling tribal battle cry; to the east, two men lay prone on the claret-stained snow following a brutal tussle, their heavy groans and gritted teeth the only discernible signs of life.

Alejandro González Iñárritu's punishing frontier western, based in part on Michael Punke's 2002 account of the life of Hugh Glass (played with grizzled gusto by Leonardo DiCaprio), transports us to a time and place where everyone and everything is in a constant state of redemption. Crucially, though, the sins committed by Glass and his cohorts – namely

Tom Hardy's redneck mercenary, John Fitzgerald, Domhnall Gleeson's easily cowed expedition leader, Andrew Henry, and Will Poulter's gutless greenhorn, Jim Bridger – are not sins against a higher power but against humanity.

Spirituality is explored to a superficial degree here, but enough to establish a fundamental disconnect between those who respect nature (and by extension humanity) and those seeking only to exploit it. One man appears to bridge this gap: Glass. Via a series of Malickian flashbacks we learn that some years ago our intrepid guide had a son by an unnamed Pawnee woman. While she is conspicuous through her absence, a now teenage Hawk (Forrest Goodluck) bears severe facial scars which paint a tragic picture of the life he and his father have left behind.

After a fateful encounter with a mother bear – a thrillingly choreographed scene that rivals the cuticle-stripping tension of the game of Russian Roulette in *The Deer Hunter* – Glass suddenly finds himself unable to protect his own cub. What happens next sets him on a dangerous new course where salvation is eventually earned not by a show of faith but a small gesture of human kindness.

Unsurprisingly, absolution is not forthcoming in the backwoods of the civilised world. There is no sanctuary in prayer or proverb, no penance and no pathos. Only chaos and fury. As such, despite the connotations of the film's title, at no point does Glass' odyssey become tantamount to a religious experience. Rather, his myth is spun in the grand American tradition of Jesse James, Jim Bowie and other timeless folk heroes – the major difference being that Glass achieved only modest celebrity in his own lifetime.

What makes this particular legend so enthralling is the visceral simplicity of the storytelling (with the help of co-writer Mark L Smith, this is Iñárritu's tightest screenplay to date). Glass is an enigma, yet the reason so little of his backstory is divulged is not because he has something to hide, but because his arc is one of regression instead of transformation. (DiCaprio's astonishingly committed performance is

essentially an extended reprise of the 'Lemmon ludes' scene in *The Wolf of Wall Street.*) For everything he is forced to endure, it's telling that Glass' journey ends the same way it began: with both a bang and a whimper.

If *The Revenant* is Iñárritu's 'Heart of Darkness', then Glass is Charles Marlow and Kurtz rolled into one – fear and obsession by turns the watchwords of his literal voyage upriver and his steady descent into madness. In this hostile environment, where subzero conditions pose as great a threat as any man or beast, Glass faces a succession of worst-case scenarios that would make Bear Grylls baulk. But just as the lifethreatening physical injuries sustained during that grizzly attack significantly impede Glass, the psychological wounds inflicted by another adversary strengthen his will to survive.

How much we invest in Glass' story is ultimately a question of empathy. Because while the grief associated with the loss of a loved one is something everyone can relate to on some level, Glass' irrepressible urge to exact terrible vengeance on an equally flawed (but not necessarily inherently evil) individual is by no means a universal human trait. This whiteknuckle old world epic is first and foremost a testament to technical artistry - take a bow DoP Emmanuel Lubezki, production designer Jack Fisk, editor Stephen Mirrione, composer Ryûichi Sakamoto - that consciously avoids engaging in the morality of revenge and is a better film for it. At 156 minutes, The Revenant is also an unavoidably gruelling spectacle that very nearly buckles under the weight of its cinematic ambition.

That said, although the film's attempts to deconstruct the human condition often feel as cold and remote as its frostbitten Great Plains setting, it does succeed in revealing some basic truths about the healing process and how the deepest cuts don't bleed. The Revenant may not land a decisive emotional blow, but the all-consuming nature of its chief protagonist's anguish makes this Iñárritu's most singularly affecting work. ADAM WOODWARD





As Mexico's macho Oscar-hoarder wows the world with *The Revenant*, *LWLies* assemble a list of curious trivia on the man of the moment.

NO.1. Iñárritu's first job as a fully-fledged writer and director was a Mexican TV movie entitled *Detrás del Dinero* [roughly translated as "Cashback"] in 1995. The bleached colours, kinetic camera movements and rhythmic editing of his early features are all present in this impressive first missive.

NO.2. While location scouting for his debut feature *Amores Perros*, Iñárritu and his crew were assaulted and robbed by a gang of teenage boys outside the house in which the film's visceral dog fight scenes were eventually shot, according to an interview with indiewire.com.

NO.3. In order to achieve the specific visual grain and texture in *Amores Perros*, Iñárritu showed his cinematographer Rodrigo Prieto a book of photography by urban demimonde photographer documenter Nan Goldin.

NO.4. Director John Cassavetes is a name constantly mentioned by Iñárritu as one of his key formal influences. This can be seen in the bruising emotional dynamics of a film like 21 Grams, the handheld immediacy of Amores Perros, and the fact that Birdman is extremely close in its theme and subject to the director's extraordinary 1977 feature, Opening Night.

NO.5. With his film *Birdman* being shot in a way that makes it look like a single take, comparisons to Alfred Hitchcock's 1948 film *Rope* were inevitable. Iñárritu told "Time' magazine: "I think [*Rope*] is a terrible film. I don't like it. I think it's a very bad film of Hitchcock's. It's a very mediocre film. Obviously, he shot with that intention and it didn't work — because of the film itself!"

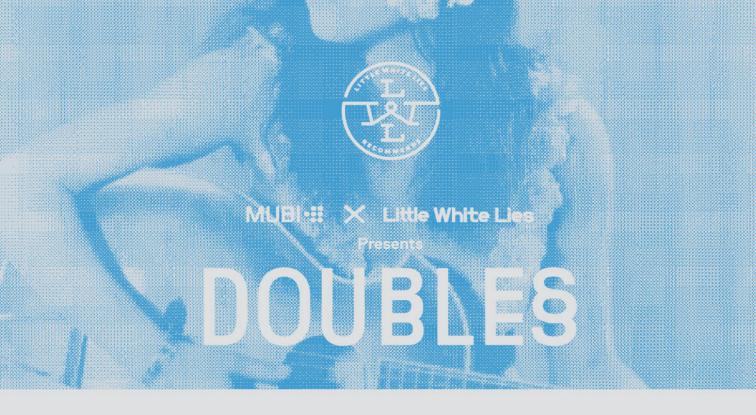
NO.6. Iñárritu is credited as Marimba player on Gustavo Santaolalla's original music score for the director's 2011 film *Biutiful*. He also lent his services as co-producer on Santaolalla's score for 2003's 21 Grams.

NO.7. A CD is said to exist of comedy sketches performed by characters Iñárritu invented during his time as a DJ for Mexico's WFM, at one time the country's most popular music station, but now known as XEW-FM and operating as a news and talk outlet. We've scourered the archives in search of this mythical item, but it certainly doesn't seem to be fore sale anywhere. Iñárritu told the 'New York Times' that he liked to mix popular rock acts like Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd (that latter of whom he has admitted to being especially fond) with local Mexican bands.

NO.8. During its production, director Alfonso Cuarón mentioned Amores Perros to his pal Guillermo del Toro, who managed to see a rough cut of the film on tape while he was shooting Blade II in Prague. He immediately called up Iñarritu and asked if he could help to complete the editing, offering to sleep on his sofa to do so. Iñarritu accepted the offer.

NO.9. The director shot a Nike advert-cum-short film for the 2012 World Cup entitled *Write the Future*. Wayne Rooney was among its host of celebrity stars, and Iñárritu told 'The Telegraph' in an interview that he thought the footballer was so natural in front of the camera that, when his sporting career was over, then there would be roles for him in cinema.

NO.10. As a way to release tension on the set of *The Revenant*, the outdoors epic that was shot in Canada, the US and Argentina, actor Tom Hardy and Iñárritu would engage in a manly hug. Though as the actor explained in an interview to 'Entertainment Weekly', those hugs often saw the two men tumbling around in the snow and trading a few friendly blows. But the pair always remained friends: "He had the affability to me of the donkey from *Shrek* and I'm Shrek," said Hardy



4 SWAN SONGS Past and Future

Inspired by Paolo Sorrentino's new feature, *Youth*, which concerns a man (Sir Michael Caine) looking back to past indiscretions, and forward to the abyss of death, we have given a special focus to the final movies made by iconic filmmakers. What do they tell us about this artist? Do they exemplify a certain style or a particular recurring theme in their work? Do they show these directors capping off their career on an artistic high or an ignoble low? For this fourth Doubles screening, we're combining two films from different eras, different cultures and different countries in a search for universal truth in this matter.

Streaming for 30 days on MUBI, we'd like to invite our readers to watch FW Murnau's 1931 film, *Tabu, a Story of the South Seas*.

It's a film which saw the lauded director of such features as *Nosferatu* and *Faust* ditching his patented expressionist style for something that was closer to documentary realism as he filmed the love lives of natives on the island of Bora Bora. Murnau died in a car accident a week before his enchanting opus was set to open. For the event half of the Double, we will be screening something quite different: John Hughes' *Curly Sue* from 1991. The film follows the Chicagobased meanderings of a hobo father-daugther unit played by James Belushi and Alisan Porter and documents the class struggle in the run-up to Christmas. Following the film, we'll be hosting a panel discussion on the great swan songs of cinema and the final will and testament of some of history's most beloved filmmakers.

Curly Sue

John Hughes' Curly Sue from 1991.

Screening + Panel Discussion
Thursday 26 January, 7pm
71a Gallery, 71a Leonard Street, London

FOR ONE NIGHT ONLY

Tabu

FW Murnau's 1931 film, a story of the South Seas. Screens on MUBI from 26 July mubi.com

FOR 30 DAYS ONLY



Spotlight

Directed by
TOM MCCARTHY
Starring
MICHAEL KEATON
MARK RUFFALO
RACHEL MCADAMS
Released
29 JANUARY



ANTICIPATION.

The subject matter may be grim, but the Oscar buzz gives it sparkle.



ENJOYMENT.

Remarkable control, sensational storytelling.



IN RETROSPECT.

An extraordinary paean to journalistic endeavour.

o you really wanna hear this shit?" a sexual abuse survivor asks Mark Ruffalo's reporter Mike Rezendes in writer/director Tom McCarthy's disciplined procedural drama Spotlight. The unspooling of hard-to-hear truths is at the heart of this story about the Boston Globe's Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative team (called 'Spotlight') who exposed child molestation by Catholic priests in the Boston Archdiocese, ultimately triggering a worldwide scandal.

As events unfold, the film makes a compelling case for old-school journalism and its methods. We are introduced to the paper's team in July 2001, who are all lapsed Catholics and are asked by incoming editor Marty Baron (Liev Schreiber) to look into claims that a Boston priest had abused over 80 children.

Although this is a 21st century story, the film is very much a paper trail of clippings, directories, letters and court-files. The team take notes and build trust as they scrutinise, probe and – most importantly – listen to the victims. The eye for detail extends to the cast's nuanced, exceptional performances: Rachel McAdams as Sacha Pfeiffer channels pure sensitivity as she allows those who share their experiences to pour their pain into her; Schreiber is movingly taciturn; Ruffalo is endearingly earnest and awkwardly insistent; while John Slattery as senior colleague Ben Bradlee Jr and Stanley Tucci as the victim's eccentric lawyer Mitchell Garabedian complete a remarkable ensemble.

Refusing to be distracted by domestic subplots, Spotlight still manages to explore the personal consequences of putting a cat amongst the pigeons. Pfeiffer is worried about her devout grandmother's

reaction, Brian d'Arcy James's Matt Carroll finds a group of paedophile priests hidden alarmingly close to his house, and the well-connected Walter 'Robby' Robinson (Michael Keaton, the film's central presence) is forced to confront friends who have been professionally complicit in wrongdoing. Their neweditor Baron is a Jewish outsider in a Catholic city whose bearish presence can't hide his anxiety. Spotlight resists histrionics, rejecting the thriller tropes that would render events more conventionally cinematic. Cinematographer Masanobu Takayanagi's muted palette respectfully reflects the seriousness of the story, the chilly, humdrum environs and the frosty reception that greets the paper's investigation; while Howard Shore's unobtrusive score creates a sense of a story gathering momentum and keeps things nailbiting when they're up against the clock. But there is no soaring climax or sweeping melodic gut-punches.

Such restraint demonstrates how the team's righteous anger is kept in check by their painstaking professionalism, and McCarthy and co-writer Josh Singer hone in on the graft, skill and value of drawing together a complex story from pieces that have been scattered and concealed. If it's a picture of journalism at its most dogged and honourable then *Spotlight* doesn't disregard the paper's own faults as it highlights a community's failings, both institutional and domestic. While there are universal truths here, it also masterfully filters in the specific context – this big city's small town mindset, the way it conspiratorially closes ranks around the church. As Garabedian sadly notes: 'If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to abuse one.' EMMA SIMMONDS



Rams

Directed by
GRÍMUR HÁKONARSON
Starring
SIGURÐUR SIGURJÓNSSON
THEODÓR JÚLÍUSSON
CHARLOTTE BØVING
Released
5 FEBRUARY



ANTICIPATION.

It's not that often we get to seen an Icelandic film in cinemas.



ENJOYMENT.

Solid moment to moment, but never feels particularly cohesive.



IN RETROSPECT.

Lots of stuff happens, but without much charm or insight.

ike an oversized beige jumper with '70s-style criss-cross patterns across the chest, Grímur Hákonarson's Rams is a bit too woolly for its own good. When the film starts, it announces itself as a dry comedy, introducing the prolonged sibling rivalry between Gummi (Sigurður Sigurjónsson) and Kiddi (Theodór Júlíusson). The brothers live as neighbours, both with mighty, ruff-like beards and both sheep farmers who have managed to pass the last 40 years without uttering a word to one another. Any trivial bureaucracy between the pair is tended to with the help of Kiddi's notedelivering mutt and a comic approporation of barking noises. When they head on their trail bikes to a local livestock competition, each with their prize ram in tow, there's the suggestion that the film will be concerned with the quaint traditions of Iceland's rural farming community. A female vet judges the rams, her modern methods painting her as an outsider. Gummi loses to his brother and, sour in defeat, secretly breaks into Kiddi's sheep shed to inspect the specimen that bested his prize ram by a mere half mark. In doing so, he uncovers a potential outbreak of scrapie, a rare and contagious degenerative disorder found in sheep and goats. To preserve the future of Icelandic sheep farming, all flocks must be obliterated. Yet instead of accepting this unfortunate turn of events as fate dealing a particularly cruel hand, Kiddi blames his brother for this mess, turning to drink and making a habit of falling asleep in the snow.

Though it's fairly obvious how the film is going to play out (and, sadly, it plays out exactly

as expected), *Rams* spends far too long dawdling when it comes to the matter of settling on its tone. There are moments that stray dangerously close to humour, though it's never really that funny. It sometimes looks like a soap opera in the vein of BBC Radio's *The Archers*, with lots of harumphing farmers whining about their sorry lot. But interest in placing the brothers' within the context of the wider community wanes until it ends up being used as a cheap plot device.

Or could this story of people suddenly losing the entire means of their wellbeing be a metaphor for Iceland's banking collapse? Maybe for the first half, but certainly not the second. There are even hints that matters might boil over and turn into a western-like thriller, with shotguns, spades and crowbars thrown into the mix. But no, it's not that either. So to quote The Simpsons' Moe Szyslak, "If you're so sure what it ain't, how about tellin' us what it am." Frankly, there's no obvious answer. Rams is all over the shop, but maybe it's to be commended for refusing to settle on a single emotional register. The one thing that sticks in the craw, however, is that it does lack a certain compassion for its characters, and while Hákonarson just about holds back from openly mocking the brothers' poverty, he does portray them as bumbling tyros out to satisfy their petty self-interests. The reason for the vendetta is eventually revealed as being suitably banal, further cementing the writer/director's feeling that rural folk are childish and irrational and should be left to their own devices. DAVID JENKINS



Chronic

Directed by
MICHEL FRANCO
Starring
TIM ROTH
RACHEL PICKUP
MICHAEL CRISTOFER
Released
19 FEBRUARY



ANTICIPATION.

Franco is a talented but raw director, this could go either way.



ENJOYMENT.

A difficult but sensitive and impressive piece of work... until it suddenly isn't.



IN RETROSPECT.

That ending leaves a nasty aftertaste.

im Roth was the president of the Cannes Un Certain Regard jury that awarded its top prize to the film After Lucia in 2012. After the ceremony he sought out its director Michel Franco to tell him how much he admired his film. Chronic is the result of that meeting. It's Franco's third feature and one of the most complex and interesting roles that the frequently under-utilised Roth has tackled in recent years. After Lucia was a ceaselessly bleak study of teen bullying that felt cheaply sadistic and manipulative in its construction, but it also showed an impressive sense of craft and an uncompromising directorial vision. The presence of an Oscar-nominated actor in a first English-language film often suggests the softening of a foreign auteur's approach to appeal to a wider audience, but that's far from the case here.

Chronic follows David, a quiet and introspective caregiver, as he attends to a series of terminally ill patients in Los Angeles. David is methodical and dedicated, and there is little doubt that he cares deeply for the people he looks after. But does he care too much? When a complaint is made by the family of a stroke victim about David's uncomfortably close relationship with him, Franco and Roth refuse to give us any clues about where the truth lies. Is David a pervert? Is he just lonely? Has he been misjudged? The waters are muddied by his undeniably odd behaviour outside of his patients' homes, when he adopts aspects of their life stories for his own, and by the slow drip-feeding of dark revelations from his past.

Franco's willingness to push this sense of ambiguity is admirable and Roth's quietly mesmerising performance, which is developed

through subtle body language rather than dialogue, keeps us hooked, wanting to know more. Franco's style is clinical and detached, but he achieves a real sense of intimacy here, and as we watch David washing, clothing, lifting or simply being a companion to his ailing patients, we get a very real sense of the compassion and patience these duties require, not to mention the enormous emotional and physical strain involved. At its best, Chronic is a remarkable portrait of the special relationship that exists between those who are looking death in the face and the people responsible for making their final days as comfortable as possible. Franco is helped enormously in this regard by the three very different, but equally outstanding contributions made by Rachel Pickup, Michael Cristofer and Robin Bartlett as David's patients.

The film's frank approach to the realities of dying marks it as a work of considerable maturity and intelligence, even if it grows a little less compelling in the final third as David's relationship with a woman dying of cancer starts to take a turn for the obvious. However, nothing can prepare you for the way Franco ends the film; a bewildering act of self-sabotage that is so misjudged and so jarringly out-of-step with what came before, it undermines all of the film's good work up to that point, ensuring that the ending will be the only thing dazed audience members will be talking about as they leave the cinema. It's a slap in the face for viewers who have invested in this story, and it's a betrayal of these actors, whose painfully authentic work deserves to be the main topic of discussion rather than a young director's glib shock tactics. PHIL CONCANNON



A one-time MMA champ completes her transition to the big screen with Deadpool.

ina Carano found fame as one of the leading lights of the Mixed Martial Arts arena before meeting with Steven Soderbergh and accepting a leading role in his superb 2011 spy feature, *Haywire*. She is now part of the latest Marvel behemoth, *Deadpool*, playing the role of Angel Dust, who is a shady henchwoman prone to bouts of adrenalinfuelled violence.

LWLIES: DID YOU HAVE ANY GREAT LOVE FOR MARVEL MOVIES BEFORE YOU CAME ABOARD DEADPOOL? Carano: I must say, I wasn't much of a Marvel or DC movie watcher. I dunno... I saw Iron Man and I saw The Avengers. But I never watched them thinking I'd eventually be in one. I've since watched them all and have developed a newfound appreciation of the whole Marvel universe. I just love that there are these fictional characters that people are so passionate about. You go to ComicCon, and you actually find people who dedicate their lives towards their

own, single superhero. You can ask someone what their favourite sport is and you can find out a lot about them. I think the same goes for superheros. I've found that it's the cooler people that I am more drawn to. I like the people who like Deadpool and Wolverine. It's become one of those things I ask people now. If someone says Batman, if someone says Superman, well... If the answer is Deadpool or Wolverine, they've clearly thought about it. I like the idea that they've done something in their lives to make them come to that conclusion.

SINCE YOU'VE MOVED INTO ACTING, DO YOU WATCH THINGS WITH THE THOUGHT OF ONE DAY BEING IN THEM? Absolutely. It's not that being in one of these types of movies hadn't crossed my mind, but I think I'm a little bit if a niggler. If you have straight hair you want to have curly hair, and vice versa. I have this really nice skill of making action look really real. When I throw a punch, I feel like people believe it. Of course, what I want to do is a romantic comedy. Or a drama. That's what I want. All the stuff I watch I think, 'Oh it would be awesome to tell this kind of story.' But I'm over here in action land where every actress in Hollywood seems like they want to be.

DID YOU HAVE ANY CONTACT WITH THE GUYS WHO WROTE THE ORIGINAL STORIES? I didn't. I've known comic writer Rob Liefeld for a few years as we wanted to make a movie of his 'Avengelyne' books. I actually took Avengelyne to director Tim Miller, and he said, 'Yeah, yeah, angels and demons, that's cool but I'm kind of an atheist.' He then took us into his little personal theatre, and said, 'Let me show you a little thing

that me and Ryan Reynolds have been working on for the last five years.' And that was two years ago. And that was the *Deadpool* teaser. This is a major passion project for Tim. Not only that, it's his first directing project. He's such a natural. He didn't try to be something that he wasn't. If he didn't know something, he had the right people around him to advise him. But when he got the momentum, he was unstoppable. And he's just the most abrasive, hilarious, sweet-hearted person you've ever met. The most abrasive things come out of his mouth. If something's not working, he'll just crack up and shout, 'That was awful!' But not in an aggressive way – he's trying to make it an open, fun environment.

WHAT WERE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MAKING A MOVIE LIKE HAYWIRE AND A GIANT PRODUCTION LIKE DEADPOOL? They were 100 per cent different. Like night and day. I really did get so genuinely spoiled by Steven Soderbergh. And also that was my first movie. It's that first experience that you can never really replicate. It holds a special place in my heart. I was so vulnerable, and the people involved knew that. And people like Channing Tatum, Ewan McGregor and Michael Fassbender gathered around to help me. On top of that, it was just a beautiful experience. The way Steven shot those fight sequences, and the fact that these actors were also up for making it feel real too... So it was a really beautiful entry into this business. Coming to Deadpool, I've gained a little bit more knowledge regarding what Hollywood is really all about. The main similarities were that that the people involved in making Deadpool were also awesome. Just lots and lots of awesome people





The Survivalist

Directed by STEPHEN FINGLETON
Starring MARTIN MCCANN, MIA GOTH,
OLWEN FOUERE
Released 12 FEBRUARY

f we keep burning fossil fuels at the rate we're going, the world will be transformed into a barren wasteland in which the survivors will battle for supremacy with the tools that remain. No, not the first instalment of a new YA sci-fi franchise, but a taciturn art film by director Stephen Fingleton. Paranoia reigns in this bloodthirsty dystopia where human contact is usually accompanied with extreme violence.

A lone survivor with swept-back hair played by Martin McCann tends to his crop, fertilising the soil with a rotting human corpse. Seldom without his rifle, this young man waits for people to pay him a visit so he can dispatch them before they sully his rural idyll. One day an old woman (Olwen Fouere) and her daughter (Mia Goth), tip-toe down his garden path in search of bed and board. But who are they? Are they alone, or an advance party for a gang of hooded marauders? He's right to think that they're here to grab his patch, and treats them with caution.

With a script that you could probably fit on to a single cocktail napkin, Fingleton's language is action not words. Why speak when a fierce glare can do the talking? The claustrophobia of this depopulated world is heightened by filming in close-ups, seldom allowing the viewer to see beyond the narrow perspective of the hero. As a calling card movie, it's mightily impressive; dramatically lean, gripping where it needs to be, and a story told with satisfying economy. As robust as it is, the film sorely lacks for originality, as this set-up is essentially co-opted from every zombie movie ever made. And while McCann is clearly consumed entirely by his character, he's not a tremendously exciting companion to spend time with. But *The Survivalist* is a gleaming golden ticket to Tinseltown, and it'll be fascinating to see whether Fingleton takes up the offer or choses to plough his own Bible-black arthouse furrow. DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION.

Thumbs have been up on the festival circuit.

ENJOYMENT. *Impressive more than enjoyable. Extremely well put together.*

IN RETROSPECT. Not quite the full article, but enough to suggest its director has a bright future. 8

Innocence of Memories

Directed by GRANT GEE Released 29 JANUARY

here's a swooning romantic melodrama reminiscent of '40s Hollywood nestled at the core of this atmospheric portrait of contemporary Istanbul from director Grant Gee. Here, he collaborates with Turkey's Nobel-prize-winning novelist Orhan Pamuk, adopting his 2008 novel 'The Museum of Innocence' as a through-line for a film weaving together music, photography, TV chat show appearances and haunting Steadicam shots of the city at night. The museum itself is an actual place that can be found on a more rarified version of the local touist trail, and this grand undertaking acts as a realworld accompaniment to the book's sweeping love narrative. The story offers a Turkish riff on 'The Great Gatsby', with the debonair Kemal falling desperately for Füsun, his coquettish cousin from lesser stock. Following her demise in a car accident, he collects every object associated with her in any vague or tangential way, and brings them together to build a shrine to a relationship that never was, and a person he never got to know with an intimacy.

Whereas this tragic tale is an attempt to show the complexity of memory and the physical imprint human beings leave on the world, Gee too tries to explore how the city itself is a repository of memories. Pamuk talks about how certain buildings can be associated with pleasant views, and when a new building is erected, obscuring that view, the old buildings remain as monuments to that lost beauty. There are times where the film resembles a museum-style multimedia exhibit, especially the shots of photographs projected over pages of text. But it's quite miraculous how the film draws you in to its subtle intrigue, and develops in surprising ways. If you haven't read Pamuk's novel, you'll want to. If you have, this – like the museum – will add a vital extra layer to the experience. DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION.

Grant Gee's Patience (After Sebald) was great.

3

ENJOYMENT.

An eloquently made and thoughtful film.



IN RETROSPECT. With this essay/documentary hybrid form, Gee has struck gold.







Goodnight Mommy

Directed by SEVERIN FIALA, VERONIKA FRANZ
Starring SUSANNE WUEST, LUKAS SCHWARZ,
ELIAS SCHWARZ
Released 12 FEBRUARY

ry as we might, we'll never truly know who our parents are. This amazing, dismaying film by Severin Fiala and Veronika Franz plays a child's need for a nurturing parent against a mother's ability relate to, and empathise with, her offspring. But what if these two impulses don't quite meet in the middle? Identical twins Lukas and Elias (played by Lukas and Elias Schwarz) have the run of the countryside, prancing, swimming, playing, exploring - doing all the things that inquisitive pre-teen boys do. Then their mother returns home (a far-flung modernist stack which looks barely lived-in) with bandages covering her face. The fun and freedom are over, and a life of sedate contemplation begins as mother's wounds heal. When the boys try to make their own entertainment, mother becomes unreasonably abusive towards them. She slaps them, insults them and punishes them, sometimes even filming it on her smart phone. Then the boys start to believe that this woman, who doesn't seem to have any knowledge of their relationship prior to this "accident", might not be who she says she is. Stylistically and thematically, this Austrian chiller is very much of a piece with the work of countrymen Michael Haneke, Jessica Hausner and Ulrich Seidl (the latter has a story and production credit here).

Cold, clinical and shot with steely geometric precision, Fiala and Franz' film is also like the ultimate homage to Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, right down to the way the directors communicate an eerie sense of geography, placing the viewer inside this nightmare house along with the frenzied characters. And while the central mystery keeps the viewer tightly locked into the drama, you're never entirely convinced that this is a clear-cut case of evil mother versus angelic kids. It's a belting horror film to kick off 2016, and it's one whose imaginative scenes of extreme violence are absolutely not for the squeamish. DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION. Not a film that's been on many people's lips. ENJOYMENT.

IN RETROSPECT. So many small details dropped in that a second viewing is vital.

Builds and builds and builds in its intensity.

4

Partisan

Directed by ARIEL KLEIMAN
Starring VINCENT CASSEL, JEREMY CHABRIEL,
FLORENCE MEZZARA
Released 8 JANUARY

It's been far too long since Vincent Cassel has been in a great movie. Furthermore, it's been far too long since Vincent Cassel has been great in a bad movie. In Ariel Kleiman's underwhelming *Partisan*, he's good, but not great as the charismatic Gregori, the Jim Jones-like leader of a curious sect in which he is the only adult male. To his cohorts he is a benign dictator, personally nurturing children from birth, schooling them, feeding them and also turning them into gun-toting soldiers. Kleiman and co-writer Sarah Cyngler leave blanks to be filled in by the imagination, such as the political and economic situation outside of this stone compound, whether Gregori is father to these children, and why the kids are regularly sent out on dirtbikes to assassinate apparently random local men.

The story is told from the perspective of Jeremy Chabriel's Alexander, a meek but devoted mini-mercenary who is starting to spot some of the philosophical inconsistencies in his leader's cheerily fascistic worldview. Despite seldom losing his temper or being drawn to violence, Gregori's fastidious rule stops the deviants in their stride with a simple punishment and reward system. It's commendable the way that Kleiman quickly immerses the viewer into this world with just a few simple, subtle strokes, but it's almost as if he doesn't know where to go from there. Chabriel makes for a bland, inexpressive lead - there's just nothing behind those piercing light blue eyes to make us yearn for him to succeed. Alexander's slow realisation that he's locked inside a nightmare is triggered by a series of elaborately phoney situations, while Gregori tries to keep his flock in line with tedious moral lessons which sorely lack credibility. There's little interest in fleshing out any of the side players, their cynical, drone-like obedience only helping to emphasise Alexander as our dullard hero. DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION.	A
Could this be the big return of Vincent Cassel?	•

ENJOYMENT.
Nah.

IN RETROSPECT. There's some decent technical stuff here, but the story's a big ol' bust.



A Bigger Splash

Directed by
LUCA GUADAGNINO
Starring
TILDA SWINTON
RALPH FIENNES
MATTHIAS SCHOENAERTS
Released
12 FEBRUARY



ANTICIPATION.

I Am Love was a beautifully decadent outlier on the art-house circuit in 2009.



ENJOYMENT.

"A trumpets-of-Jericho, white hot fuck."



IN RETROSPECT.

A modern cinematic opera – the sun-kissed bacchanal followed by the tempestuous comedown. n an early scene of Luca Guadagnino's A Bigger Splash, his follow-up to 2009's I Am Love, dinner companions admonish Harry (Ralph Fiennes) over his choice of urinal – "Harry, that's a grave!". "Yeah, well," he quips, "Europe's a grave!" Riffing on Jacques Deray's 1969 film La Piscine, A Bigger Splash pursues this death-of-Europe narrative with a level of bawdy panache that belies the seriousness lurking beneath its polished veneer. Casting aside Deray's more brooding eroticism, the picture puts forward a friskier, more wanton vision of sexuality. Imagine the self-obsessed bourgeois navel-gazing of Lawrence Kasdan's The Big Chill distorted into a sun-kissed bacchanal. It's a terrific picture; cool, lascivious and hot as hell.

Tilda Swinton plays Marianne, a rock singer rendered temporarily mute. She is holidaying in the Italian countryside with her partner Paul (Matthias Schoenaerts), a quiet, burly photographer, still reeling from a recent suicide attempt. Their sojourn is interrupted by the unscheduled arrival of brash, flamboyant Harry, a former flame of Marianne, along with his recently reacquainted teenage daughter, Penelope (Dakota Johnson). A Byronic cad, Harry - Fiennes at his peak - is a gabby, preening rake who is clearly there to win back Marianne. In fact, the 19th century poet proves to be a surprisingly pervasive influence; not only does the setting recall Villa Diodati, the mansion on Lake Geneva where Byron, fleeing from debt and rumour, holed up in 1816, but, just as Byron was the last of the Romantics, Harry himself feels like the last of their modern day iteration - a libertine from the age of the rock star.

The late-period Rolling Stones are another fixation throughout. In a key scene, Harry breaks into an impromptu dance to 'Emotional Rescue', the record which marked the end of the band's golden era. Guadagnino makes A Bigger Splash feel like 'Emotional Rescue', with its high gloss and louche millionaire swagger, before shifting into the apocalyptic doom boogie of 'Gimme Shelter' ("A storm is threatening / my very life today"). The key to this transition is Penelope. With the camera lingering over her midriff, she is introduced as a slinky, seductive presence, but it soon becomes clear that she, with her slyly deployed barbed comments, is the savant of the group (eagle-eyed viewers will note her revealing choice of reading material); the disrupter ushering in the storm.

The third act plot turn which blights La Piscine is beautifully handled in A Bigger Splash, with the picture's operatic structure, along with Guadagnino's irrepressible flair for high melodrama, amplifying the sensory impact. In the final act, the tensions and resentments which were hitherto concealed by carnality bubble over. For much of the film, we're swept up in its intoxicating precoital rush. But as darkness descends in the closing moments, finer points come into greater focus, culminating in a morally ambivalent epitaph for the modern Romantics; the bohemian rock stars and their libertine pretenders. Which brings us full circle to Lord Byron and the end of 19th century Romanticism, dying in exile with its principal progenitors in Italy and Greece. Perhaps Harry is right - Europe is a grave. CRAIG WILLIAMS



The Italian
director of A Bigger
Splash talks painting,
Tilda Swinton
and channelling
Harpo Marx.

LWLIES: HIS MOVIE IS BASED ON MATERIAL THAT WAS MADE INTO A FILM CALLED LA PISCINE IN 1969 BY JACQUES DERAY. WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THAT FILM? Guadagnino: Such a negative opinion! That is part of it I have foggy memories of seeing it on TV. It was summer. I was about 15. I've never been particularly drawn in by Alain Delon. I was a very arrogant cinephile at that age. I am still a cinephile, I hope now not an arrogant one. From the arrogant cinephile standpoint, La Piscine was a bit of a boring trifle. I was aware that when Jacques Deray was making that film, other directors were making films that were groundbreaking - they were political and committed to reality. All the new waves in France, Germany, Italy, Brazil and America.

WAIT - WHY ARE YOU NOT DRAWN TO ALAIN DELON? He was fantastic in the Visconti films, in particular Rocco and his Brothers. He just didn't click with me visually. I'm a voyeur, I need to click

with someone. He's like Ryan O'Neal. There's something woody about him. In fact, Ryan O'Neal and Stanley Kubrick made *Barry Lyndon* together, and Kubrick used O'Neal the right way, for his woodiness. Delon, being so iconic, overcomes the films he's in. I don't know. It's probably a pure matter of taste. Of course he was fantastic in *Nouvelle Vague*, the film by Jean-Luc Godard.

SPEAKING OF GODARD, A BIGGER SPLASH RECALLS HIS FILM LE MÉPRIS QUITE A BIT. Going back to the whys and what hooked me into making this film, I wondered: how do you represent desire and a charade if you put yourself into the shoes of the people who were contemporary to Jacques Deray, but they were involved in a revolution? How would Godard have approached this movie? I didn't want to mock the style and form of those people. But I wanted to know what the meaning of these images would've been to those people. I very much thought of another Godard movie -Sympathy for the Devil. I thought a lot about one of the mentors of the nouvelle vague, Roberto Rossellini and in particular his film Voyage to Italy, where you have a couple in crisis who can't live together and they can't live apart. I wanted to make a Voyage To Italy for today. I'm not sure I reached that peak, but it's a good guide.

YOU'VE TALKED ABOUT THE DAVID HOCKNEY PAINTING 'A BIGGER SPLASH' AND HOW IT WAS AN INSPIRATION. Everything that has to do with this generation of iconoclasts – from art to film – was explored. So you have Godard and Rossellini. And of course, it's a movie about a pool, so why not go back to the greatest visual artist who produced that reflection on

the surface? And that's Hockney. For me that painting is one of the greatest masterpieces of the 20th century, because it has so much truth to it and it demands the viewer to challenge him or herself with so many questions: who is that diving into the water? What happened before? What's going to happen after? What is the nature of the fall into the water? Who is in the house? It's beautiful. It's a very hypnotic, Hitchcockian painting.

DID IT STRIKE YOU THE FIRST TIME YOU SAW IT? It struck me, and it allowed me to understand what art is. I knew it was regarded as a great painting by an important man. And in its apparent simplicity, it prompted me to ask myself why A Bigger Splash is considered a masterpiece. That led me to understand that an image is layered. And there's a lot there to carry.

TILDA SWINTON'S CHARACTER IN THE FILM DOESN'T SPEAK, WHICH MAKES THIS EVEN MORE OF A VISUAL WORK. This was Tilda's idea. She said that she thought Harry (Ralph Fiennes) was this unleashed id force who spreads himself everywhere with words. I think that if Mariane couldn't talk, then the inarticulacy could be a great juxtaposition to his articulacy.

HER PERFORMANCE FEELS ROOTED IN SILENT CINEMA. When I saw her acting during the first day of the shoot, and it was the scene in the kitchen where she's preparing a fish, I look at her through the camera and I thought she reminded me of somebody. And suddenly it came to me: Harpo Marx. She has the curly hair, and she was doing Harpo Marx



In the Heart of the Sea

Directed by
RON HOWARD
Starring
CHRIS HEMSWORTH
CILLIAN MURPHY
BRENDAN GLEESON
Released
26 DECEMBER



ANTICIPATION.

'Moby Dick' is incredible!



ENJOYMENT.

This isn't based on 'Moby Dick'.



IN RETROSPECT.

Oh.

riginally scheduled for a March 2015 release before a last-minute promotion into prime awards territory to fill Warner Brothers' festive season *Hobbit*-hole, it's about time Ron Howard finally got his Dick out. A year's worth of advertising have insisted this isn't Herman Melville's 'Moby Dick', but rather an adaptation of Nathaniel Philbrick's historical bestseller; a telling of the true [*cough*] events that befell The Essex whaleship in 1820, the very same that would serve as inspiration for The Greatest Novel In The English Language.

Truth may be stranger than fiction (especially when you throw a vengeful, super-sentient whale into the equation), but it can also be a lot less interesting, especially when you throw Ron Howard into the equation. Most bizarre is that it's a notion with which In the Heart of the Sea would appear to agree. Using Melville (Ben Whishaw) as part of a framing device - he calls on a survivor played Brendan Gleeson to recall the tale as research for his next book - the film goes out of its way to tell us that 'Moby Dick' is probably a better story than the one that will be told here. "You may not like what I have to say, but every word will be true," Gleeson says, as if veracity should trump enjoyment. "That's it, you have your story!" he tells Melville later, "I think I'll go with my version," Melville as much as replies.

So what could have been a Werner Herzogquoting battle of futility against the forces of nature, couched in myth but disguised in tentpole blockbuster scale, becomes an episodic series of CGI-disasters with little shape beyond its adherence to the "facts" of the matter.

Functional, practical, but winning few points for style, Ron Howard has always been the cinematic equivalent of a pair of catalogue-ordered khakis; this Boxing Day release being a generous seasonal gift for those mourning the lack of a *Top Gear Christmas Special*. Rolling up his sleeves for some nautical hijinks – Whale! Shipwreck! Cannibalism! – Howard shows off the fruits of a study period clearly spent with the Harvard Ethnography Lab's excellent, 2012 sea life documentary, *Leviathan*. That he's also been taking aesthetic advice from fellow member of the shirt-tucked-into-jeans club, Tom Hooper, sadly redresses the balance.

Luckily cinematographer Anthony Dod Mantle is on hand to stall the sinking ship, fittingly at his best when - quite literally - shooting a sinking ship. Yet there's only so much Dod-Mantling one can use to distract from an over-dependence on such poor SFX work, all the more telling when the practical effects work a charm. The supporting cast's work aboard the reconstructed Essex hums with a more convincing sense of business than the fatally miscast Chris Hemsworth, a cardboard archetype left to get his am-dram Crimson Tide on with landlubbing superior, Benjamin Walker. It doesn't help that Howard struggles to find visual coherence in his action beats, and the less said about the loss of bottle (cut to melting candle) when it comes to the cannibalism, the better. What remains is an opportunity for an intense, Jaws-like thalassophobic nightmare, squandered.

MATT THRIFT



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Jem and the Holograms

Directed by
JON M CHU
Starring
AUBREY PEEPLES
STEFANIE SCOTT
JULIETTE LEWIS
Released
12 FEBRUARY 2016



ANTICIPATION.

The director of Step Up 3D tackles a much beloved '80s cartoon.



ENJOYMENT.

A highly flawed, occasionally dumb, but fascinating blast of neon, revisionist girl power, and social media wanderlust.



IN RETROSPECT.

A heartfelt Hollywood oddity that doesn't deserve its "disaster" label.

on M Chu's Jem and the Holograms begins with a series of makeshift musical performances and yearning video confessionals taken from actual YouTube accounts. Together they form a mosaic of virtual expression that connects the film's ramshackle narrative with our collective identity crisis in the social media age. Blurred lines are important to this neon-hued adaptation of the popular 1980s television cartoon, which depicts the rise and fall story of an overnight Internet sensation and her three bandmate sisters.

Instead of fearing digital technology, the film embraces it wholeheartedly. During an early monologue to the camera, lead singer Jerrica (Aubrey Peeples) explains that the Internet is her "closest friend." Yet her younger sister Kimber (Stefanie Scott) is the one who lives life virtually, documenting every second of the day on Facebook, Instagram, and the like. Long ago, the two were adopted by their Aunt Baily (Molly Ringwald), who was already raising two foster daughters of her own, Shana (Aurora Perrineau) and Aja (Haley Kiyoko).

Now teenagers, the sisters have different interests and attitudes but are still connected by a strong familial bond and sense of artistic freedom. This closeness is challenged after Jerrica records a powerful performance as Jem, her alter ego who becomes a mysterious pop culture phenomenon after the video goes viral. Hollywood comes calling in the form of a tenacious and nasty pill of a music mogul named Erica Raymond (Juliette Lewis), who woos the foursome with promises of fortune and fame.

Jerrica's self-aware voice-over narration

communicates Jem and the Holograms' core themes . Her ongoing monologue tries to debunk the myth of female hysteria while confronting the doubt inherent in honest artistic expression. The ghost of her inventor father looms over the proceedings, namely in the form of an uncompleted robot named "Synergy" that eventually leads Jerrica and company down a tangential path of self-discovery.

If Chu can't quite decide which genre or story to embrace – this version of *Jem* clumsily mixes rock opera, sci-fi and melodrama – he's in brilliant control of certain moments that merge new technology and classical Hollywood editing. During Jerrica's initial online negotiation with Erica, Chu crosscuts to a YouTube video of duelling drummers. The escalating battle of beats mirrors the one between the characters, producing a thrilling juxtaposition of online entanglement.

Yet *Jem and the Holograms* has too few of these highs, getting bogged down in meandering, conventional plot points and dumb dialogue. Whereas Chu's *Step Up 3D* leaned heavily on the blissful physicality of bodies in motion, his latest only hints at the kinetic visuals in Jerrica's digital playground.

For all its flaws (and there are many), the film doesn't deserve the vitriol lobbed at it by dismissive critics and angry fans. Chu's weird, heartfelt vision has a distinct perspective regarding online wanderlust and understands the vibrancy of colour (a ferris wheel on the Santa Monica pier looks like a spaceship ready to lift off). But most of all it appreciates the tenacious will to be real in a world where everything is an illusion, no matter how ill-fated the pursuit. GLENN HEATH JR



Our Brand Is Crisis

Directed by
DAVID GORDON GREEN
Starring
SANDRA BULLOCK
BILLY BOB THORNTON
ANTHONY MACKIE
Released
22 JANUARY



ANTICIPATION.

David Gordon Green has been on a low-key roll of late.



ENJOYMENT.

Plays to the peanut gallery.



IN RETROSPECT.

Too light, too silly.

he misery-sodden entertainment of electioneering is a dismal metaphor for Machiavellian, self-serving corruption in all walks of life in David Gordon Green's down-the-line political comedy, Our Brand Is Crisis. Even though it's a film which professes to know all the angles, it's maybe not delivering as radical a statement as its makers believe. The suggestion that corrupt, patriarchal, business-minded politicians cannot be cleaved from their ingrained beliefs in the name of social democracy and compassion is cynicism 101. But this liberal trump card is laid over and over in a story whose guiding principle is that the process of ruling a nation is one that is naturally guided by contempt - justice and happiness are a mere myths, and the poor will always get the thin end of the wedge.

Sandra Bullock's "Calamity" Jane Bodine is so-called because she has made a name for herself as a key propagator of dirty politics. She's a slick fixer hired with the sole task of winning elections and leaving the moralistic bullshit (and blacklash) for someone else to deal with. That people might die at the hands of the tyrants she places into power is mere bagatelle. She has her designer shades to deflect the grim realities of what she's doing.

We meet her after a period of personal healing, where she has left the rat race behind to make pottery bowls in the mountains and recover from a course of EST for mild psychosis. There's an election in La Paz, and the American-endorsed stooge is massively trailing in the polls. That's meaningless, though. She's brought back into the fold with the irresistible chance to take down one of her key political rivals, Pat

Candy (Billy Bob Thornton), a balding bastard who knows her tactics and is the only one able to respond to them with any vim or vigour. The film is a series of skirmishes in which the pair mete out tit-for-tat violence with the hapless candidates (the "puppets") becoming the actual human targets. Bodine wins the trust of her employer Castillo (Joaquim de Almeida) by reeling off a stream of inspirational quotes by Warren Beatty. It's an interesting touch considering the film resembles Beatty's own *Bulworth* from 1998, itself a liberal cine-brickbat (powered by hip-hop) aimed at the insidious corporate forces who have infiltrated the halls of power. Alas, there is no hip-hop in this film (or local equivalent).

Though Bullock is surrounded by a large ensemble, the side players, among them Anthony Mackie, Anne Dowd, Scoot McNairy and Zoe Kazan, don't get much of a look-in. It makes the film about her, and her feisty monologues and unpredictable behaviour make her a lovable if ethically tainted heroine. But this is not a film about political corruption, it's a film charting Jane's realisation that what she is doing has far-reaching negative ramifications, and whether revealing a newfound caring-sharing side would be too little, too late. While she thinks she's the puppeteer, there are others above her who are pulling those strings. Set against Green's recent work, it's certainly less interesting than his run of whimsical miniatures, Prince Avalanche, Joe and Manglehorn. There's an anonymous, in-the-shadows feel to the way it's been shot, and while there's a certain poetry to that situation, it does mean that a certain profundity and artistry has been lost in the transition. DAVID JENKINS



Trumbo

Directed by
JAY ROACH
Starring
BRYAN CRANSTON
HELEN MIRREN
MICHAEL STUHLBARG
Released
5 FEBRUARY



ANTICIPATION.

Finally, a big screen platform for Bryan Cranston's abundant talent.



ENJOYMENT.

Fast, funny, if a little flimsy.



IN RETROSPECT.

With Cranston this good, all else fades into the background.

ollywood in 1947 was, to paraphrase Dickens, the best of times and the worst of times. The American movie business was deep into its golden age, production was bountiful and cinema attendance was hitting record levels before television began to take its piece of the pie. Perhaps a victim of its success, the film industry stumbled into the sights of the House Un-American Activities Committee's quest to root out communists. Hollywood became a vipers' nest, gripped by suspicion and home to an army of backstabbers.

Director Jay Roach (maker of the *Austin Powers* trilogy and *Meet the Parents*) takes on this subject with energetic irreverence. Adapted from a biography by Bruce Cook, he spins the story of Dalton Trumbo, the highest paid screenwriter in the business before his crashing fall from favour. A fully paid up member of the Communist Party, he was one of the Hollywood Ten, blacklisted for refusing to cooperate with the committee's witch hunts. Bryan Cranston plays Trumbo like a dog with a bone as we meet a man of cheering rebelliousness and apparent irrepressibility. His ordeal will, nevertheless, bring him perilously close to his knees.

The bright, upbeat telling of this tale has a defiance of its own, but whereas the more solemn approach of George Clooney's *Good Night, and Good Luck*. focused on broadcast journalism's tangle with McCarthyism in the '50s and was able to draw out the sadness of such persecutions, Roach seems more comfortable with spiky comedy than, say, the agony of Trumbo's imprisonment. And he rarely gets to grips with the scale of the injustice. Plus John McNamara's script

lacks the bite and snap of his subject's own work, even though it manages a reasonable approximation when he serves up the vicious verbal exchanges between some of Hollywood's most powerful players.

Trumbo paints a colourful if somewhat caricatured picture of Tinseltown. Helen Mirren plays gossip queen Hedda Hopper like a poisonous panto dame, while John Wayne's screen heroism is turned on its head as he's revealed as a behind-thescenes bully. The don't-give-a-shit attitude of Coenesque B-picture producers the King brothers - who become Trumbo's partners-in-crime - are hilariously realised by John Goodman and Stephen Root. Elsewhere, Christian Berkel's portrayal of the bullish Otto Preminger is similarly rib-tickling and Dean O'Gorman makes a very convincing Kirk Douglas. But, discounting Trumbo himself, Louis CK's ailing writer Arlen Hird and Michael Stuhlbarg's Edward G Robinson are the only other characters given any real depth, with the latter turning on his friends to save his flagging career.

Cranston justifies the film's focus in commanding style. His role showcases both an aptitude for comedy and seasoned dramatic chops. We see Trumbo transform from champagne socialist to courageous defender of free speech, and from ignominious inmate to obstinate workaholic as he claws back his success, penning the screenplays for *Roman Holiday* and *Spartacus* as his domestic idyll falters. The actor's sublime, multi-faceted performance is the film's heart and soul, and reason enough to see this accessible, undeniably entertaining story behind a scandal. **EMMA SIMMONDS**



The *Trumbo* star tells of playing a political dissident and having a lot of time for Jeremy Corbyn.

alton Trumbo was one often men sent to prison by an overreaching government during the Communist witch hunt that blighted Hollywood during the 1940 and '50s. Here Bryan Cranston, who plays the *Roman Holiday* and *Spartacus* screenwriter in a new biopic, offers his take on that dark episode in his industry's history and explains why civil liberties are precious.

LWLIES: TRUMBO IS YOUR FIRST POST-BREAKING BAD LEAD ROLE. DOES IT FEEL LIKE YOU'RE ENTERING THE NEXT CHAPTER OF YOUR CAREER? Cranston: I find it reduces anxiety if you only focus on what you can control. I try not to focus on the bigger picture too much.

WERE YOU AT ALL MINDFUL OF OTHER FILMS ABOUT THE HOLLYWOOD BLACKLIST, FOR EXAMPLE GUILTY BY SUSPICION AND THE MAJESTIC? Not really, I certainly wasn't wary because of those films. I'm a firm believer that a film has a chance to succeed only if that story is really well done. Then we've got a chance. But it can

still fail. Movies are like soufflés – you can have all the right ingredients but for some reason it turns out terrible. It all comes down to the script, and I think we had a good one in this case.

WHAT WAS THE MOST ILLUMINATING THING YOU DISCOVERED ABOUT DALTON TRUMBO WHEN RESEARCHING FOR THE ROLE? Just his nature. He was a contrarian who wrote letters constantly, to the school board to the power company... He was that guy. That thorn in the side of the establishment. And he was a leader, too, he helped to create unions and stood up for the little guy. The American Communist Party was an offshoot of a political party of the working class, but he wasn't a Communist, he was a Socialist. He loved being rich, but he had compassion for the working class.

IS IT EASIER TO INHABIT A NON-FICTIONAL CHARACTER, ESPECIALLY ONE AS FLAMBOYANT AS THIS? Different characters present different challenges. The trick with non-fictional characters is not to do an impersonation. He loved to pontificate and gesture, so that gave me a lot to work with.

HE HAD SOME CURIOUS WORKING HABITS AS WELL, LIKE WORKING ON HIS TYPEWRITER FROM HIS BATHTUB. DO YOU HAVE ANY SIMILARLY PECULIAR WORKING HABITS? When I write or read I like to listen to non-lyrical music, usually classical or jazz. But the typewriter thing was actually quite pragmatic because he had a bad back from constantly being hunched over at his typewriter, and his doctor told him he needed to soak his back. Hey presto, bathtub desk.

DO YOU THINK THERE'S ANY DANGER OF SOMETHING LIKE THE HOLLYWOOD TEN BEING REPEATED? Yes I think there is, which is why I think this film is a cautionary tale. For example, right now the NSA wants to be able to have carte blanche on wire tapping people's phones and viewing their emails. Since 9/11 our world has changed and you have to accept that there is a different threat. Conventional wars are no more. It's drones and it's cyber warfare. The message of Trumbo is that civil liberties must not be ignored. If they are thrown aside suddenly you could find yourself in a situation like Nazi Germany. Now, I'm not saying that what happened to the Hollywood Ten is on a par with what happened then, but there are comparisons to be made.

TRUMBO SAID THAT THERE WERE ONLY VICTIMS IN THIS STORY. Well the irony is that the purpose of the House Un-American Activities Committee was to weed out Communist insurgency. They didn't do that. The only thing they succeeded in was destroying lives.

WE'RE NOT SURE HOW CLOSELY YOU FOLLOW UK POLITICS... Somewhat. I like that Corbyn guy.

... IT FEELS LIKE WE'RE BECOMING INCREASINGLY INTOLERANT OF OTHER PEOPLE'S POLITICAL VIEWS. That's exactly what's been happening in America. It's almost as if it's a sporting match, like if the opposition has a good idea and implements that idea, that means we lost. It's a warped sense of politics. We can be on opposite sides of the political class and do things that benefit each side. We've lost sight of that, I think



A War

Directed by
TOBIAS LINDHOLM
Starring
PILOU ASBAECK
TUVA NOVOTNY
SOREN MALLING
Released
8 JANUARY



ANTICIPATION.

The people who brought you A Hijacking set the controls for the Afghan front line.



ENJOYMENT.

Surprisingly underwhelming as it gets underway, but certainly clicks into place in the second half.



IN RETROSPECT.

The movie's telling overall design impresses the more time you have to think about it.

s the title perhaps suggests, at some basic level all wars are the same. Men kill each other, their wives suffer at home, children cry. While this Afghan conflict drama unfolds, giving us a Danish POV on the perils of the frontline and the challenges of the Copenhagen home front, that sense of generic sameyness however, does rather kick in. And not to the film's advantage either.

The knuckle biting tension which writerdirector Tobias Lindholm and his decency-exuding leading man Pilou Asbaeck carefully built up together in their previous Somali pirate thriller A Hijacking whipped up expectations that they'd deliver something pretty special here, yet it feels like a movie we've seen before. TV news coverage, vérité docs like Restrepo and even the potent British indie flick Kajaki have all served to render the lives of Western troops treading warily in fear of the Taliban fairly familiar on-screen territory. Lindholm's persistent, observational camera and his instinct for visual authenticity do keep it all watchably real, but as incoming fire, IED carnage and tricky negotiations with sceptical locals put compassionate Asbaeck's command skills to the test, there's not much here to rock us on our heels. Meanwhile, back home with three misbehaving kids, it's understandable his other half Tuva Novotny is looking pretty frayed, but her strivings are of a different order of intensity from the challenges faced by shipping company exec Soren Malling in A Hijacking, making lifeand-death decisions on the phone to trigger-happy

Somali warlords.

Still, just when you think you've got a handle on where the movie's going, there's a knock on the door and everything changes. Unfair to say anything more than that, but the revised scenario in which Asbaeck now finds himself causes him and indeed the rest of us - to work back through all the decisions he'd made in the movie's opening salvos, particularly his dealing with an Afghan family who'd come to him for help after the Taliban had spotted them in conversation with the Danish contingent. Suddenly, the movie shifts up a couple of gears, becoming more complex and involving and taking us to places we never expected to go. There's now a key role for the steely Malling, as Asbaeck's canny guide through the moral minefield now surrounding him, and the full extent of Lindholm's narrative agenda at last comes to light. As a filmmaker he's terrific at rendering the fractious textures of demanding personal experience, yet he's ultimately interested in the wider issues - here laid out like concentric rings of responsibility, from the individual, to the family unit, thence to the state itself. What comes across is an apparent restlessness in Denmark about the standards of conduct expected of their own personnel while the Taliban conduct warfare on their own ruthless terms. As the haunting final image leaves us to ponder, it's one thing to honour the courage of our military in no-win situations, but shouldn't we also be questioning the whys and wherefore of the political decisions which put them there in the first place?

TREVOR JOHNSTON



Freeheld

Directed by
PETER SOLLETT
Starring
JULIANNE MOORE
ELLEN PAGE
STEVE CARELL
Released
19 FEBRUARY



ANTICIPATION.

Julianne Moore and Ellen Page in a civil rights drama? Count us in.



ENJOYMENT.

Another worthy issues movie just in time for Oscar season.



IN RETROSPECT.

Why does Michael Shannon get the best written part in a lesbian drama?

In February 2014 actor Ellen Page gave a rousing, inspirational and moving coming out speech at the inaugural Thrive conference. She spoke of the "pervasive stereotypes about masculinity and femininity that define how we are supposed to act, dress and speak" and how they, "serve no one". She also talked about the courage it takes to stand up to these norms. So the appeal of this project based on a true story which also takes inspiration from an Academy Award winning documentary by Cynthia Wade in which she gets to play a gay woman fighting for the right to her dying partner's pension is clear. Unfortunately, despite the refreshing representation of women, the Peter Sollett's Freeheld fails to capture many convincing or stirring moments and plays out like an average TV movie. Passable at best and condescending at worst, it's a 50-shades-of-beige retelling of a galvanising moment in cultural history.

When Detective Laurel Hester (Julianne Moore) is informed she has stage four lung cancer she prepares for the worst to ensure her partner Stacie Andree (Page) is taken care of financially when she passes away. But things don't prove to be that simple due to the straight, all-male New Jersey Board of Chosen Freeholders in Ocean County, New Jersey, who refuse to break with tradition and grant Laurel her dying wish. It's a case that made headlines with the board eventually setting a new precedent for gay-rights marriage.

With a documentary already explaining the facts behind the case, the question of what fresh new ideas this dramatisation bring to the table remains. The answer is very few. Screenwriter Ron Nyswaner delivers a stale, passionless script that doesn't dig deep enough into Hester and Andree's relationship; they meet at a volleyball game where they eye one another up over the net, go on a date where Hester whips out her pistol on a gang of lesbian-hating thugs and then they head for a spot of fishing on the beach. A year later they're living together.

The lifeless direction and frankly embarrassing action sequences which add nothing to the story other than repetitively attempting to remind the audience that Hester is as capable as any of the male officers on the force drag badly. Nyswaner neglects to forge an engaging story and ends up relaying the facts in a mechanical manner. The romantic dynamic between Page and Moore is flimsy, with Moore sharing more chemistry with Michael Shannon who plays her work partner Dane Wells. Then in marches Steve Carrell, draining away any small amount of poignance as activist and founder of Garden State Equality, Steven Goldstein. His performance smacks of falseness.

Once Hester's cancer treatment starts and the case against the freeholders begins, things take a turn for the moving. The reality of Hester's chemotherapy is tough to endure, with Moore turning in a restrained but affecting turn. But by this point, with hardly any investment in the thinly drawn lesbian characters, Nyswaner leaves it up to Shannon's everyman to rally the troops and whip up the film's few inspirational if somewhat cheesy moments. KATHERINE MCLAUGHLIN









Hana-Bi

1997 Directed by TAKESHI KITANO Starring Released 11 JAN TAKESHI KITANO KAYOKO KISHIMOTO **REN ÔSUGI** Blu-ray

here was a point where Japanese filmmaker Takeshi Kitano seemed like he was on the verge of gaining access into the highest echelons of world auteur cinema, a name to be uttered alongside the modern greats. Seeing his latest offering at the 2015 London Film Festival - the pitiful, self-mocking OAP gangster comedy, Ryuzo and his Seven Henchmen only confirmed that the promise of future greatness has long dissipated. This new film arrives deep into the director's latter-day wilderness years, which began with wacky (but at least interesting) attempts to deconstruct his own image, and then strayed on to more openly commercial terrain. The highlight of his creative salad days arrived with 1997's Hana-Bi, translated in the US as "Fireworks", and deserved winner of the Venice Film Festival Golden Lion that year. This extraordinary film sees Kitano himself - still physically on the mend following a serious motorcycle accident which damaged the nerves in his face - playing a Keatonesque cop who, having witnessed the death of his partner, decides to re-route his time into helping those close to him, including his cancer-stricken wife with whom he engages in a near-silent relationship. Mixing the implacable tough guy bravado of Dirty Harry-era Clint Eastwood with melodrama and references to Akira Kurosawa's "I've-wasted-my-life" classic, Ikiru, Hana-Bi's wistful acceptance of life's unavoidable shittiness helps it remain one of the pinnacles of nineties cinema. Every shot is methodically composed and timed, and the bluntly decisive editing is near Kubrickian in its cut-glass precision. Also of note is the fulsome, melodic score by Hayao Miyazaki's regular composer, Joe Hisaishi, which makes for a surprisingly perfect aural companion to the scenes of hushed contemplation whuch are peppered with moments of sudden and brutal violence. DAVID JENKINS

A New Leaf

Directed by ELAINE MAY	1971
Starring WALTER MATTHAU	Out Now
ELAINE MAY JACK WESTON	Blu-ray

t's nice that there's no consensus as to which is the best Elaine May movie. Having only been able to direct four feature films to date (though she has been able to spread herself further and wider as a writer), there is admittedly not the biggest selection to chose from. But there is enough material to confirm that she is a comedy director without equal, and that rare example of a person who makes funny films concerning the foibles of both sexes. Her debut feature is a modern screwball on a par with the classics, the tale of a despicable trust-fund jagoff whose psychotic lust for money leaves him severely wanting in the human compassion department. Walter Matthau is exemplary as the cantankerous playboy Henry Graham, in search of a wealthy dowager to fund his pampered lifestyle and whom he can murder when the time is right. Enter May herself as Henrietta Lowell, a botany professor who may be the most believably gawky character in the history of cinema. She is the essence of sincerity, and is blind to Henry's callous schemes. Even though he could crumple her in his claw, Henry tries to endear himself to her, even agreeing to drink her favourite cocktail, Mogen-David extraheavy Malaga wine with soda water and lime juice. The title A New Leaf is explained as an oblique expression of love in the film's beautiful final scene, yet prior to that it's a work loaded with insight into relationships, human compatibility and the scourge of the idle rich. Like Henry, the writing is of an altogether higher stock. This new Masters of Cinema Blu-ray arrives with a new video essay by the critic David Cairns and a booklet of new and vintage writing on the film. Here's hoping May's The Heartbreak Kid, Mickey and Nicky and Ishtar aren't too far behind. **DAVID JENKINS**









The Friends of Eddie Coyle

Directed by PETER YATES	1973
Starring ROBERT MITCHUM	Released 25 JAN
PETER BOYLE RICHARD JORDAN	Blu-ray and DVD

magine being comfortable with your status as a working class stiff, having zero aspiration to rise up the economic ladder and achieve some kind of greatness. In the world of organised crime, such thoughts are pertinent, as it goes without saying that the higher and quicker you rise up the ladder, the harder and faster you fall from it. Peter Yates' elegiac crime film, The Friends of Eddie Coyle, suggests that it's actually those who remain at the bottom who suffer the most. Actor Robert Mitchum channels a lifetime of playing bruised loners, crestfallen tough guys and charismatic cads into the character of lovable Irish lug, Eddie 'Fingers' Coyle, a low level Boston gun-runner who's been surviving on charm and good will alone. From the film's opening scene where Coyle runs verbal rings around an upstart gun seller to get a good price for some knock-off merchandise, we can see that he's a man who knows all the angles, but he's also a man out of time. He's like a slick-talking classic movie crim displaced in the savage modern jungle. Despite an old school savvy, it's clear from early on in the film that his small fry type is not long of this Earth. In between his sideline in huckstering, he frequents a dive bar and canoodles with his loving wife, but is forced to take matters into his own hands when a potential stretch in prison lands on his lap. His only way out is trying to ingratiate himself with a local cop looking to hook some big fish, but Eddie knows that, in prison or outside, his time is up. It's a mournful death song about the impossibility of salvation and absolution, made all the more brilliant by Mitchum's superlative central turn, like a grizzly bear slowly succumbing to the pain of an arrow lodged in its abdomen. DAVID JENKINS

Underground

Directed by EMIR KUSTURICA	1995
Starring PREDRAG MANOJLOVIC	Released 22 FEB
LAZAR RISTOVSKI MIRJANA JOKOVIC	Blu-ray

aving gone dark since his awful documentary portrait of footballer Maradona in 2008, it's probably a good time to check back in with Serbian maverick Emir Kusturica, especially as he has a new film in the offing. A one-time darling of the Cannes Film Festival and one of a precious few to have scooped the main prize there on two separate occasions, Kusturica's hyper-shrill party movies have fallen out of favour somewhat. Yet mere minutes into his 1995 masterpiece, Underground, and you're reminded that the modern cinema landscape is far less fun without him, particularly as no-one is really making this type of madcap epic any more. Belgrade 1941, and we're dropped into a firestorm of male lust as pals Blacky (Lazar Ristovski) and Marko (Predrag Manojlovic) zoom through town on horseback, trailed by a tavern brass band. Waking up the next day amid the ruins of their pleasure-seeking, a Nazi bombing raid turns much of the city to rubble which, little do they know, kick starts the 50-year disintegration of Yugoslavia. A community is formed in a cellar as the world above changes beyond recognition, with the violently cheerful Blacky and Marko forced to question their friendship as political alliances draw them apart. Though fast and furious in the way it barrages the viewer with information, the film keeps half-an-eye on the bawdy wisecrack and never succumbs to saccharine preaching about what remains an extremely sad geopolitical situation. Kusturica's knockabout style will not be to all tastes even though he's very open about what this film is from the off. And yet the real coup here is in the film's final chapter, where the gales of music and laughter finally stop, and a heartbreaking serenity takes over. The director then gives us one of the most breathtaking final shots in all cinema. DAVID JENKINS









The American Friend

Directed by WIM WENDERS	1977
Starring DENNIS HOPPER	Released 12 JAN
BRUNO GANZ LISA KREUZER	Blu-ray

s journalists understandably lavished hearty praise on Todd Haynes and his two leads, Rooney Mara and Cate Blanchett, around the release of Carol, mentions of the author upon whose book the film is based, Patricia Highsmith, remained a little lower in the mix. You see, her novel 'The Price of Salt', about an inter-generational lesbian romance set in '50s New York, was deemed atypical of her traditional focus on crime and criminals. Yet watching Wim Wenders' "straight" noir thriller The American Friend (based on Highsmith's 1974 thriller 'Ripley's Game') while keeping Carol in mind, you can see that a subtle homoeroticism bubbled through much of her work. At the time of production, Highsmith was completely against the casting of Hollywood mad dog Dennis Hopper as wily career criminal Tom Ripley, and with his natural coarseness of character, it's easy to see why. Yet she grew to love him, and maybe the sheer oddness of his presence opens out the text into something more interesting and unwieldy than a cut-and-dried crime flick. It's the story of Ripley coercing Bruno Ganz's Hamburg-based family man and picture framer to commit a series of murders when the latter discovers he has a life-threatening blood disorder. Though Wenders shoots for all-out tense thrills during a pair of astonishing assassination sequences (both set on a train), the film is more interesting when viewed as a gay love story. Though Ripley is an outwardly affable gent driven by ill deeds, Jonathan's hang-dog presence and his dedication to his family (who will receive payment when he dies) causes him to come out into the open and help this patsy to live another day. The disc comes with new interviews with Ganz and Wenders, and the film itself salutes the classic noir heyday with supporting turns from legends Nicolas Ray and Samuel Fuller. DAVID JENKINS

The Brain That Wouldn't Die

Directed by JOSEPH GREEN	1962
Starring JASON EVERS	Out Now
VIRGINIA LEITH ANTHONY LA PENNA	Blu-ray

Placing regularly on lists of the worst films ever made, Joseph Green's comically flat-footed sci-fi/horror quickie from 1962, The Brain That Wouldn't Die, is very much worth a visit. It's no lost classic whose radical message was muffled amid laughable effects work and a cod philosophical script that feels like it was hastily concocted by the on-set catering team. But there's a misbegotten charm to this silly fable about maverick brain surgeon Dr Bill Cortner (Jason Evers) who saves lives by turning his back on The Rules. Indeed, his questionable methods bring patients back from the cusp of death, but is it wrong to play God, as his colleague asks him after he performs another high-wire brain operation. Mayhem breaks loose when his leggy girlfriend (played by Virginia Leith) is decapitated in a car smash-up, and he decides to cast his Hippocratic Oath into the wind and use experimental methods to keep her brain alive. All he needs now is a hot bod on to which he can sew the head. But in his haste, he neglected to predict that the side effect of all his neurosurgical tampering would be that his gal would develop telekinetic powers - not good when she's also suffering from some serious body image issues. The film looks and sounds like it was put together with string, sellotape and old toilet rolls, but that's what lifts it above the B-movie pack. One scene set in a strip club sees two go-go dancers descending into a fist fight, their near-inaudble dialogue sounding like it has been over-dubbed in a wind tunnel. But it's the shoddy production values that gives the film a surreal charm, a story about flawed humans that's been made by flawed humans. And every time you see Leith's severed head on a table with suction-cups attached to it, you'll laugh just that little bit harder. DAVID JENKINS









The Graduate

Directed by MIKE NICHOLS	1967
Starring DUSTIN HOFFMAN	Released 23 FEB
ANNE BANCROFT KATHARINE ROSS	Blu-ray

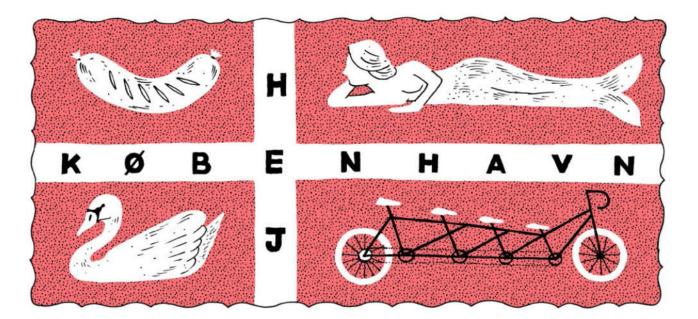
his critic is ashamed to admit that, despite having watched a fair few films in his time, Mike Nichols The Graduate had remained long on the "not seen" pile. And yet, through years of cultural osmosis and references in TV shows and other films, it always felt like I had seen it without actually seeing it. Finally sampling this new Blu-ray edition of the beloved sixties sex comedy, the sad realisation arrived that the film amounts to little more than the parodies that it went on to spawn. Dustin Hoffman trials his Rain Man schtick as preppy nebbish Benjamin Braddock, fresh out of college and straight into the maneating sights of friend of the family, Mrs Robinson (Anne Bancroft). And what with his parents being braying dorks, what better act of rebellion than falling directly into this harridan's sun-tanned arms? The famous seduction scene that has become a mainstay of TV clip shows occurs earlier than expected, though still has the power to tickle in its magnificent awkwardness. But light humour eventually becomes light disappointment when the film, which initially appears to be a about a powerful female character trapped in her stifling middle class existence, ends up being solely concerned with Benjamin's soppy rite of passage. Never arty or brave enough to land as a serious exploration of loved-up souls passing in the night, though never conventional enough to be pegged as a mainstream classic, it's tough to know exactly who this odd odd film is for. With its deathly winsome Simon & Garfunkel soundtrack, you might guess that it's for greasy sensitive types who like to hole themselves up in a bedroom and write meaningful poetry to the girls they never speak to. Per usual Criterion Collection standards, this disc is packed to the rafters with cool extras, though. DAVID JENKINS

The Southerner

Directed by JEAN RENOIR	1945
Starring ZACHARY SCOTT	Released 12 JAN
BETTY FIELD J CARROL NAISH	Blu-ray

here's the feel of a religious parable to Jean Renoir's The Southerner, made in Hollywood with the director having fled from France because of the occupation. Zachary Scott's Sam Tucker is a paragon of goodness, dirt poor but determined to make something of himself and provide for his family. When Sam's old uncle, a life-long cotton picker, keels over in the heat of the fields, he advises him to get out while the getting's good and start his own farm. And so Sam gathers up his kin and packs them into a rickety cabin, seeing only opportunity in the arid land around him. Sam does right by everyone, even his miserly neighbour whose acrimony is the result of years of bad fortune. Yet something is conspiring against his success. Something intangible. Fate? Nature? The destructive force of other people? God? Adapted from the novel 'Hold Autumn in Your Hand' by George Sessions Perry, Renoir's film is yet another of his scintillating explorations of what it means to be human and what it means to exist among other humans. The director is seldom sidetracked by crude plotting or dramatic contrivance, always attempting to show the sensual pleasures that come of simply existing. The busted old stove in the cabin stands in as a metaphor for the stubborn continuation of life - even when disaster strikes, smoke puffs from the chimney and the family huddle round it to keep warm. Even though the film depicts the difficulty of making a life for yourself from the fruits of the land, it certainly espouses doing so. At one point Sam's pal Tim says that he can get him a job in a factory where he can earn seven dollars a day. They then jovially debate the nature of freedom - does having money in your pocket which allows you to enter into the capitalist system make you free? Or does being able to chose not to enter into that system make you free? DAVID JENKINS

CPH: DOX



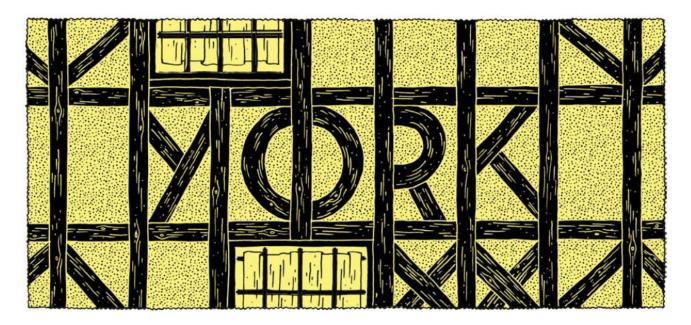
he variety of issues and voices presented at the Copenhagen International Documentary Film Festival makes it one of the most exciting events on the film calendar. Such is the scope of the programming, it's also practically impossible to catch everything that's on during the festival's 10-day run (the programme itself is the size of a phonebook). Thankfully, the quantity is generally matched by quality, making this a place for discovery. This year was no different, although there was no obvious stand-out in the form of a *Citizenfour* or *The Look of Silence*, which took the top prize here in 2014. The 2015 CPH: DOX Award went to Robert Machoian and Rodrigo Ojeda-Beck's *God Bless the Child*, a charming film about being young, carefree and inquisitive. The film takes us to suburban California, where a mother has "abandoned" her five kids, leaving 13-year-old Harper to play babysitter for the day. It's a tender reality TV-style drama with a twist that's well worth seeking out.

One of the challenges facing the programmers is making the festival as accessible and inclusive as possible while pushing documentary as an artform. Several films succeeded in that respect: Pablo Chavarría Gutiérrez's *The Letters*, an immersive sensory portrait of a small Mexican province told via a series of letters from a convicted school teacher-cum-social activist to his teenage daughter; and Dryden Goodwin's *Unseen: The Lives of Looking*, which attempts to make sense of the world by exploring the work of three individuals – an eye surgeon, a human rights lawyer and a geologist – and their relationship to "vision"; and Ewan McNicol and Anna Sandilands' *Uncertain*, about a strange bunch of bayou dwellers caught between two states in America's Deep South. However, conventional documentary journalism was again CPH: DOX's strong suit, with films like *A Good American* and *The Fear of 13* enhancing the festival's reputation for unearthing budding Errol Morris types.

Our top pick was Friedrich Moser's essential docu-thriller, A Good American, a chilling exposé of deceit and corruption at the highest level of US government. Holding court is former intelligence agent Bill Binney, whose story begins in the mid-'60s when the then rookie recruit was employed by the Army Security Agency. Binney is a numbers guy and, as later revealed, a code-breaking rock star. When the NSA snapped him up in the 1970s, Binney set to work on developing a highly sophisticated piece of surveillance technology that effectively became the world's first automated metadata analysis service. If it sounds complicated, that's because it is. Binney clearly relishes explaining the finer nuances of his ThinThread system, which was ultimately dismissed in favour of the comparatively costly and ineffective Trailblazer Project, but to Moser's credit the weight of the film's subject is never undermined by Binney's obsessive jargoning.

The shock claim here is that, had it been properly implemented, ThinThread would have prevented 9/11. Given the discourse surrounding the NSA in this post-Snowden era, this might seem like an opportunistic bombshell drop, but Binney's candid testimony is damning in its rejection of mass surveillance based on bogus intelligence and guesswork. He's not a whistleblower in the traditional sense but rather – as the title suggests – an upstanding citizen who simply wants to have his say. He's not interested in having his moment in the spotlight, he just happens to have a vital story to tell. The irony is that had his government not betrayed him in such a contemptuous manner, he might never have come forward. Because of Binney's calm, levelheaded demeanour, Moser attempts to ratchet up the film's emotional intensity by cutting to archive newsreel of the Twin Towers falling. It's a little heavy-handed and frankly unnecessary – Binney's evidence is compelling enough

Aesthetica Film Festival



he city of York plays host to one of the UK's most respected and wide-ranging short film festivals, run in association with Aesthetica magazine. Aside from sampling a variety of the films being programmed, I was asked to attend the festival as a delegate, to present a 45-minute talk on film criticism in the digital age. Not someone who is generally able to reel off this kind of insight from memory, I carefully penned a speech which, through three very specific examples, attempted to explore the cultural gamut of modern writing on film. If I'm being honest, the talk didn't feel like it was successful. Or at least didn't provoke an in-the-moment reaction I had hoped for. The spaces left in the text for laughter and wonderment became moments of dead air.

Thinking that it had been a bit of a bust, I sullenly opened up the floor for questions, and within minutes I discovered that not only had the audience been paying attention to what I was saying, they were completely engaged and intrigued by this somewhat marginal subject matter. One young student who I could've sworn was rolling his eyes and cackling derisively as I was orating posed a fascinating question. Some context first: I had espoused objectivity in criticism. That is, an avoidance of levelling personal value judgements at a work of art. When we say that an actor gives a good performance in a film, we're talking about ourselves, not the actor. We leave it to the reader to guess what our definition of "good" is. At the same time, I also espoused writing with a personal imprint which draws on experience and allows the reader to know that a real person created these words. The student asked whether this was a paradox. Could we channel our personality and remain objective at the same time? Transforming momentarily into a harried politician, I didn't have a direct answer, instead talking around how this was an utopic ideal rather than a practical possibility.

Having had a few weeks to think about this, I can now take the opportunity to answer that student with more, if not total clarity. The question has to do with traditional notions of authority. When a critic become invisible, losing themselves in their prose, it allows the reader to focus clearly on the subject. But where this mode worked in print publications in which, to become a critic, you have to be specially ordained by a bureaucratic order, it works less well online. At the start of the new millennium, a cloudburst of film critics entered onto "the scene", and with them came a vast deluge of critical copy. But to make sure your voice was heard above the melée, you had to bring personality into the mix. And with fewer overseers telling you how to write, you could do that and let the audience vote with their feet as to whether they liked it or not.

The best film I saw at the Aesthetica Film Festival was called The Romance Class by director Stuart Elliott. It's a short in which six women discuss the best and most believable way to end an old fashioned romance novel. They come together in a church hall, their ideas and egos immediately clashing. While five of the women offer suggestions which channel their own, often bitter experiences with men, the final woman a sheepish, homely type who struggles to have her voice heard above the rhubarbing - offers a pearl of naked truth which comes out of nowhere. Instead of making the ending about herself, she suggests a simple scene which depicts what it is that creates and maintains a loving relationship, not her subjective experience of one. It's a heartbreaking moment simple, tender and evocative of the idea that we should try to notice small, beautiful moments that speak of a wider truth, not just the things that make us happy. Just as I tried to express the idea of film critics being mindful of their relationship with the subject, director Stuart Elliott's film is a statement about the objective essence of great cinema

Jinxed!

- DIRECTED BY -

- STARRING -

Don Siegel

Bette Midler Ken Wahl Rip Torn

- TRAILERS -

- CHERRYPICK -

Slender Betrayal, The Wonderbread Story, We've Got Your Dog, Charlie Brown! "Get me a wine bottle, a rubber chicken and a tuning fork!"



- TAGLINE -

'America's favourite tootsie is on a roll.'

- RELEASED -

1982

on Siegel's swan song, Jinxed!, can't do right for doing wrong. It is the celluloid actualisation of the joke about the Irishman who walks into a bar holding a turd in his hand. "Look what I nearly stepped in!" Raising Arizona crisscrossed with Double Indemnity? Killer Joe taking a Weekend at Bernie's? Paris, Texas shot in the style of an especially nihilistic Road Runner cartoon? Jinxed! makes a good case for all of them at once. But just like our hapless Irishman, all the good intentions in the world count for nought if all you end up with is a handful of dog mess.

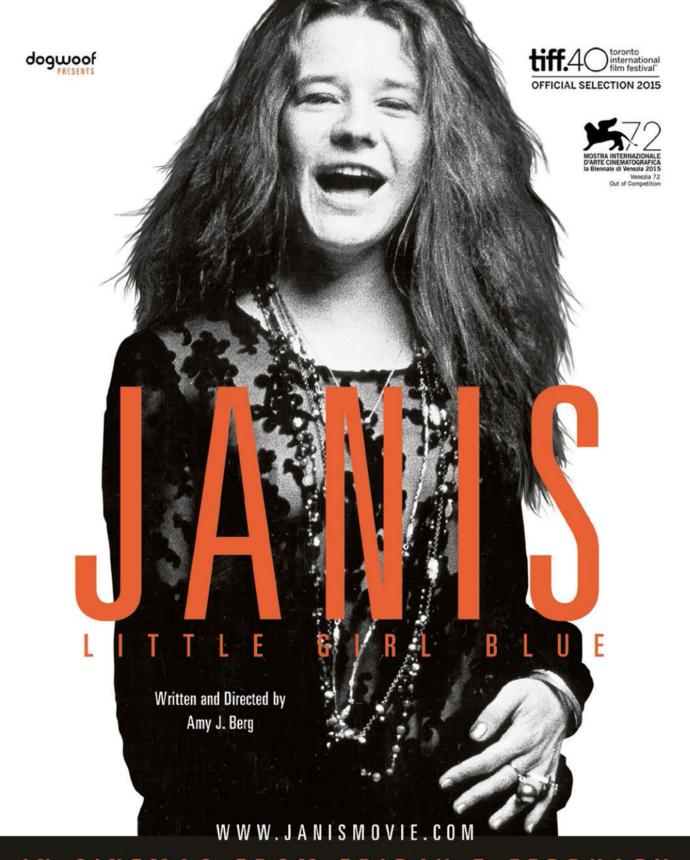
Scripted by a Pulitzer Prize-winner (ooh!) and the writer of Michael Jackson's Moonwalker: The Video Game (ahh...), Jinxed sets itself up as a warm 'n' wacky celebration of smalltime trailer-park nobodies trying to get ahead in life. Bette Midler stars as a big-hearted singer named, for some reason, Bonita Friml. Encased in eye-watering spandex, sci-fi sunglasses and enough make-up to choke a horse, Bonita waddles and wisecracks her way around the frayed edges of the Nevada lounge circuit like Lady Gaga's mother – Ma Gaga, if you like – while her seersucker husband, Rip Torn, alternates between gambling, boozing and threatening to "bust her a new baloney-hole!" But when he finds he has some strange casino voodoo over blackjack dealer Ken Wahl (a dead-eyed Huey Lewis mannequin), plots are laid, angles are played and the film goes straight to hell.

Director Don Siegel was not only in ill-health when making *Jinxed!*, but had recently been through an epic falling-out with former bezzie mate Clint Eastwood. The ramifications of crossing Clint are evident in how deep in Hollywood blackballs Siegel had sunk for him to be accepting frothy bollocks like this. It's almost a relief to say this would be his last film.

Torn's career, meanwhile, was bedevilled by on-set punch-ups, drinky-drinky-ness and lawsuits – hat-trick! He was once famously arrested – sloshed and armed to the teeth – having broken into his local bank, defending his actions by saying that he thought it was his house. Here he looks to have taken the method route in a role that requires no more than ornery, juiced-up bastardry. Wahl had his own troubles. The perennially 'accident prone' actor – who once broke his neck falling down the marble stairs at Rodney Dangerfield's girlfriend's house! – hated Midler so much that he claimed their love scenes made him feel he was, "cosying up to Hitler."

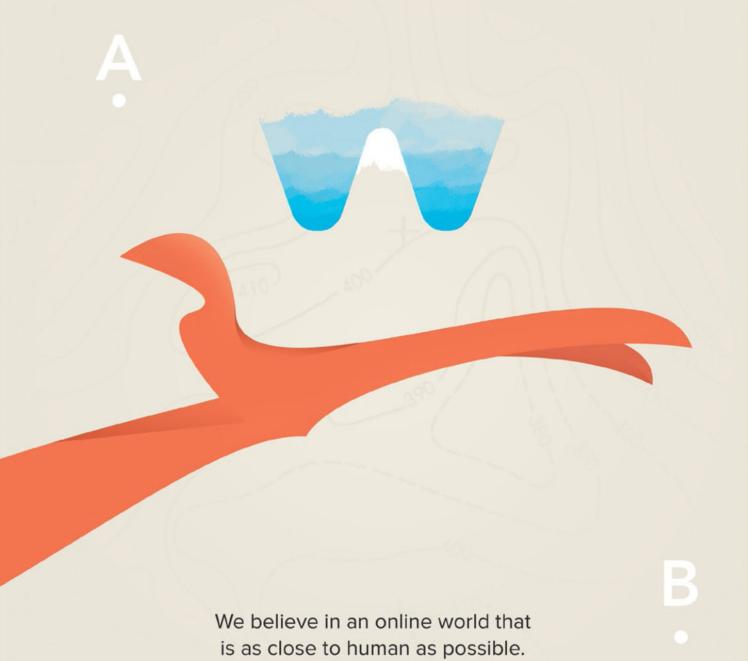
With all of this hard-luck congealing around the film, it perhaps comes as no great surprise that Siegel had a massive heart attack during filming. The real puzzler is that he called in Sam Peckinpah, at the time ostracised for some rascally outburst or other, to help. Yet Peckinpah put in such a sterling shift that he was offered the chance to direct what would be his own final fling, *The Osterman Weekend*. So the question remains: how fucked is your movie when Sam 'Mad Dog' Peckinpah is its surest variable?

Midler remains immune the mounting hoodoo, but with Torn written out of the plot and Wahl apparently refusing to work with her, she spins-off on to an oblique, time-consuming backwater scavenger hunt in order to pad out the film's contractually-obliged runtime. The final shots see her bellowing showtunes in a dilapidated Plutonium mine high in the Sierra Nevadas. Her bubble perm glistens amongst the dusty shafts. No spell or enchantment can touch her. She sings of how she is God's great favourite and will never die. She has looked into the evil eye and it has blinked. She is hollow. She is golden. And she must dance. And sing. Sing really, really loud



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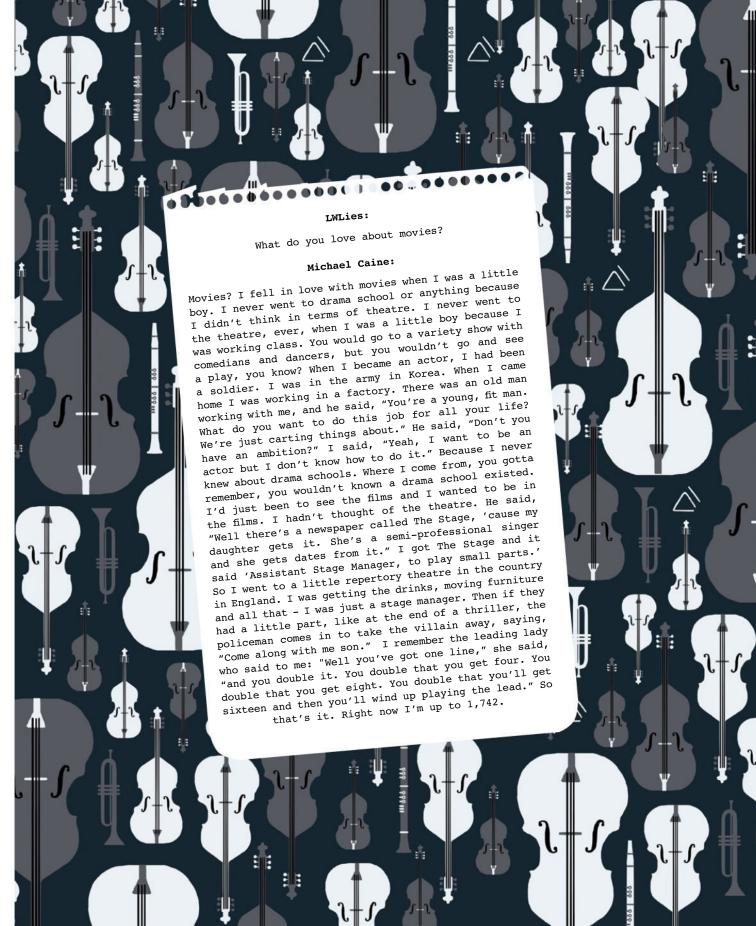


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